

Mastergradsoppgave

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Girls and education in Uganda

A study of girls and their
perceptions of gender-based
inequalities in the education system



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Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven undersøker hvordan ugandiske jenter og kvinner oppfatter kjønnsforskjeller i det ugandiske utdanningssystemet, og ser på utdanningssystemets rolle i overføring, produksjon og omforming av etablerte kjønnsnormer.

Studien gjør bruk av ulike kvalitative forskningsmetoder, hovedsakelig semi-strukturerte intervjuer og gruppediskusjoner, for å utforske kvinnelige læreres og studenters oppfatninger, meninger og ideer relatert til kjønn og utdanning.

Oppgaven fokuserer på å formidle kvinnenenes egen stemmer.

Nøkkelord:

Utdanning, diskriminering, kvinner, kjønnsforskning, Uganda, Afrika, seksuell trakassering,

Abstract

This thesis examines how girls and women perceive gender inequalities in the Ugandan education system and looks at the role of education in the process of transmitting, creating and transforming gender norms. Applying various qualitative research methods, in particular semi-structured interviews and group discussions, the study explores female teachers' and students' voices, opinions and ideas regarding gender and education.

Key words:

Education, gender, women, discrimination, development, culture, sexual harassment, Uganda, Africa

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Foreword

I would like to thank all the informants who participated in the research: students, teachers, head teachers and all other stakeholders.

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Bø, Norway, June 2014

Linn Obrestad

1 Introduction

This paper looks at girls ‘and women’s experiences within the education system of Uganda. What is it like to be a girl in school in Uganda? What do the girls think about their education situation?

This chapter provides the reader with some background information on the topic of research, briefly describing the context and choice of topic, as well as presenting the thesis statement and an outline for the rest of the thesis.

1.1 Choice of topic

In 2009 I got an opportunity through FK Norway (Fredskorpset) to stay and work in Uganda for 12 months to work as a teacher and to make short films about various FK initiatives in the Kampala region. Through my work I got in touch with a lot of people concerned with various education related challenges and most notably challenges associated with girls and the “gender gap” found in (particularly) secondary and higher education. My interest in this subject led me to start working on a documentary about girls and education and my film material became the starting point for this study. I extended my stay for an additional 6 months and have been back a few times a year since moving back to Norway in 2011, continuing my research and filming. In this thesis I am analysing and interpreting data I have gathered since 2009. My research and analysis combines quantitative and qualitative approaches in an effort to both say something about the general tendencies related to girls’ education in Uganda, and to give a more intimate description of school-related issues and the various challenges faced by Ugandan girls when it comes to education.

As a teacher and filmmaker I am interested in issues related to schools and learning as well as in telling stories. To be able to filmicly tell the girls’ stories the way I wanted I needed to get to know them well. I needed closeness, a familiarity built up over a long period of time, equivalent really to anthropological field work. The same is obviously true when it comes to this paper; to be able to forefront the girls’ voices regarding gender and education issues I needed to both know and understand the context in which they live their lives but also to get to know the girls well enough for us to trust each other. My pre-conceived ideas had to be eliminated to make room for the ideas, perception and perspectives of the girls. The combination of making a documentary and conducting research have some potentially problematic issues connected to it which will be addressed more closely in Chapter 3.

During the 18 months I spent in Uganda from 2009 to 2011, I divided most of my time between two sites; the capital Kampala and the Central region, and the city of Gulu and the Northern region. I also travelled throughout the country visiting schools and meeting teachers, students, and others in the education line of work. I travelled with both government officials and NGO'S and tried to get as much information on the education situation as possible.

I also worked at some schools, and stayed at a boarding school for longer periods. My house was situated at the "girls' end" of campus and I got to know several of the girls well.

Although this study focuses on girl's experiences in secondary education I also look into the situation in primary and tertiary education to get a fuller picture. My aim was to get a thorough understanding of the education situation in Uganda and to get female perspectives on particularly gender issues in relation to education in Uganda. Most academic studies on gender and education in Ugandan reveal that although access and retention for girls have improved since the implementation of Universal primary and secondary education (in 1997 and 2007 respectively), girls still have a higher dropout rate than boys and their academic performances are poorer than boys after p7. I wanted to know what the girls' themselves felt regarding these issues and their perceptions of "being a girl" in the education system and in Uganda.

1.2 Research question

Academic literature regarding gender inequalities in relation to education in Sub-Saharan Africa and Uganda mostly contains discussions built on secondary analysis of large-scale surveys conducted by the government and other agencies. In this study however, I have focused on obtaining and presenting primary data, focusing on the perceptions and conceptualisations of female students and staff regarding gender and education. This is an exploratory study that aims to foreground the informants' opinions about these issues while relating it to their socioeconomic backgrounds, values, beliefs, expectations and complaints as well as to more general experiences within the education system. The informants navigate financial trouble, sexual harassment, orphanhood and various (sometimes conflicting) expectations from their families, peers and society at large, and they rebel against or conform to prevailing ideas while chasing their dreams, interests and needs as far as they can. As they explore the experience of being female, they call attention to the ways in which society limit and trap their possibilities and outcomes but also to reflections on strengths, areas of improvements, and alternative possibilities and ways of living fulfilling lives.

The main research question when exploring these issues is as follows:

What are Ugandan females' opinions and practices regarding gender based inequalities in secondary and higher education?

To answer this question several other questions are also explored, among them:

What for young Ugandan girls are considered normal? What kind of lives do they create and lead, regardless of challenges and difficult circumstances?

1.3 Thesis outline

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter Two provides the reader with some background information on the topic of research and of the research location of Uganda, briefly describing Uganda's historical roots and its current societal, political, ethnical and socio-economic structures and challenges. Furthermore, it introduces Uganda's education system, as well as current development approaches towards an «education for all» with focus on bridging the gender gap.

Chapter Three explains the conceptual scheme, the detailed research approaches and the qualitative research methodology of the study. It examines and considers the challenges, limitations, and ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter Four sets out the theoretical framework of the study. It examines conceptual underpinnings and determinants related to the issues at hand including post-colonial-, feminist- and learning- theories. It also discusses the main approaches regarding gender disparities in education in the world and in Uganda.

Chapter Five is dedicated to the analysis of the research data. It is divided into two parts; exploring first teachers' and then students' conceptions, practices and ideas for change. It looks at "being a girl" within the educational system and focuses in particular on female students' own views of their situation. The analysis is based on the theoretical framework of the study and the political and societal background spelled out in the previous chapters.

Chapter Six summarises and discusses the major findings of the research. The final chapter is followed by References and an Appendix, which includes maps, tables, the interview outlines and additional information regarding the study.

2 Background and context

2.1 Uganda

Uganda is a landlocked country located in East-Central Africa, west of Kenya, east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, bordering South Sudan to the north and Tanzania to the south (see maps on page 3 and 4). The terrain is mostly plateau with rim of mountains. It averages about 1,100 metres above sea level. .

Uganda was colonized by Britain in the late 1800. The colonial boundaries created by Britain to delimit Uganda grouped together a wide range of ethnic groups with different political systems and cultures. These differences prevented the establishment of a working political community after independence was achieved in 1962. The dictatorial regime of Idi Amin (1971-79) was responsible for the deaths of some 300,000 opponents; guerrilla war and human rights abuses under Milton Obote (1980-85) claimed at least another 100,000 lives. The rule of Yoweri Museveni since 1986 has brought relative stability and economic growth to Uganda. A constitutional referendum in 2005 cancelled a 19-year ban on multi-party politics (CIA Factbook). However, President Museveni has been in power for 28 years and he seems in no hurry to exit his office. The opposition accuses him of authoritarian tendencies and disputed the 2011 election results.

Until relatively recently, hundreds of thousands of people in northern Uganda were terrorized by the cult-like Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by Joseph Kony. The LRA began its activities more than 20 years ago and its forces became notorious for abducting children to serve as sex slaves and fighters. At the height of the conflict, nearly two million people in northern Uganda were displaced. The LRA was forced out of Uganda in 2005/06 and since then has wreaked havoc in the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. With the LRA's departure, northern Uganda has undergone a positive transformation. Thousands of former LRA fighters and abductees have left the group and been reintegrated through Uganda's Amnesty Commission (BBC 2013). However, this region still has a long way to go and the education situation is still one of the poorest in the country.

Uganda has within the last 20 years become relatively peaceful, stable and prosperous. However, recent developments, including the abolition of presidential term limits before the

2006 elections, Museveni's confirmation of a bill which severely limits freedom of assembly – media censorship, and the persecution of democratic opposition have attracted concern from domestic and foreign commentators. Most recently, indicators of an alleged succession to the President's son have increased tensions.



Figure 1 Africa (source: CIA Country Factbook)

Summarized country facts

Population	35,918,915 (2014 est.)
Age structure:	0-14 years: 48.7% (male 8,714,354/female 8,765,900) 15-24 years: 21.2% (male 3,775,679/female 3,833,574) 25-54 years: 25.7% (male 4,618,088/female 4,615,616) 55-64 years: 2.1% (male 405,740/female 447,118) 65+ years: 2.1% (male 327,771/female 415,075) (2014 est.)
Ethnic groups:	Baganda 16.9%, Banyankole 9.5%, Basoga 8.4%, Bakiga 6.9%, Iteso 6.4%, Langi 6.1%, Acholi 4.7%, Bagisu 4.6%, Lugbara 4.2%, Bunyoro 2.7%, other 29.6% (2002 census)
Languages:	English (official national language, taught in grade schools, used in courts of law and by most newspapers and some radio broadcasts), Ganda (Luganda) (most widely used of the Niger-Congo languages, preferred for native language publications in the capital and may be taught in school), other Niger-Congo languages, Nilo-Saharan languages, Swahili, Arabic
Religions:	Roman Catholic 41.9%, Protestant 42% (Anglican 35.9%, Pentecostal 4.6%, Seventh-Day Adventist 1.5%), Muslim 12.1%, other 3.1%, none 0.9% (2002 census)
Urbanization:	Urban population: 15.6% of total population (2011)(rate of urbanization: 5.74% annual rate of change (2010-15 est.)).
Major urban areas	Kampala (capital) 1.535 million (2009)
Sex ratio:	At birth: 1.03 male(s)/female 0-14 years: 0.99 male(s)/female 15-24 years: 0.99 male(s)/female 25-54 years: 1 male(s)/female 55-64 years: 0.99 male(s)/female 65 years and over: 0.8 male(s)/female Total population: 0.99 male(s)/female (2014 est.)
Mothers mean age at first birth:	18.9 years (note: median age at first birth among women 25-29 (2011 est.))
Life expectancy at birth:	Total population: 54.46 years Male: 53.1 years Female: 55.86 years (2014 est.) (country comparison to the world: 209)
Total fertility rate:	5.97 children born/woman (2014 est.) (country comparison to the world: 5)
HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate:	7.2% (2012 est.) (country comparison to the world: 10)
Education expenditures:	3.3% of GDP (2012) (country comparison to the world: 131)
Literacy: (definition: age 15 and over can read and write)	Total population: 73.2% Male: 82.6% Female: 64.6% (2010 est.)
School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education):	Total: 11 years Male: 11 years female: 11 years (2009)

Source: CIA Factbook

2.2 Uganda's education system

2.2.1 Pre-colonial education

In pre-colonial Uganda, traditional education socialized children to develop strong ethnic and clan identities. Prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries and European explorers, indigenous ethnic groups emerged as people formed social and political organizations with varying degrees of centralization. Some Ugandan ethnic groups, such as the Baganda and Banyoro, ruled through hierarchical kingdoms, whereas others, such as the Langi and Karimajong, governed themselves through decentralized clan networks and cycling age-set systems. The indigenous people of Uganda traditionally taught their young using methods that greatly differed from the classroom instructional methods imported by the Europeans. Teaching was inherent in the way people lived their lives. Students were educated through everyday experiences as they learned observing the behaviour and listening to the words of the more experienced members of the society. All adult members of the society, especially the parents and elders, were responsible for teaching the children about how to live as and appreciate their roles as members of the family, clan, and ethnic group. Oral poetry and literature played a significant role in preserving the history of the clan and ethnic group. Traditional education also created gender identities. Children learned different skills according to their gender: females learned how to cook and clean, while males learned how to herd cattle and to farm. Mothers and aunts prepared girls for marriage and wifedom. Fathers and uncles taught boys how to grow up to become strong men, who could protect and provide for the needs of the family. Maintaining a coherent group identity was crucial for each ethnic group in its struggle for survival and expansion and traditional education, as the dominant form of education, enhanced the ethnic and clan identity of the people. Christian missionary education began to change these ethnic identities by introducing European and Christian values to the indigenous people (Mino 2011: 51-53).

2.2.2 Colonial and Post-colonial education

Missionaries introduced formal western education to Uganda, as in many other African colonies. The conventional wisdom suggests that this was mainly through altruistic considerations to bring enlightenment to its natives. The education system, however, had an in-built slant that meant it suppressed local knowledge and promoted inequalities through unfair access (male only, certain tribes were preferred etc.) The education system was not a neutral entity operating in a vacuum. The expansion of the colonial state created the need for

skills to help the administration and the rolling out of necessary infrastructure. Mamdani argues in his book *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda* (2008), that the ensuing missionary education was designed as a tool of control, not one of empowerment.

“The political usefulness of missionary education, it should be clear, stemmed from its dual nature: that it was technical as well as ideological, that it imparted skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as values such as loyalty to the existing order and disciplined self-sacrifice in the interest of that order”

After gaining independence in 1962, the new Ugandan government pursued the Africanisation and the nationalisation of school curriculum, in order to promote Ugandan and African identity. Traditional education continued to reinforce ethnic identity at the family level, and missionary education continued to promote the Christianization and westernization of local identities, but the post-colonial state sought to bring Ugandan and African identity to the fore by refurbishing the Anglocentric curriculum.

During the rule of Obote and Idi Amin (1966-1979), ethnic divisions were greatly pronounced and the instability and conflict of these years hindered the expansion of education throughout Uganda. Under Amin school attendance rates dipped low due to violence and extreme instability, and the Ugandan government gradually lost its ability to fund education because Britain and the United States cut off their aid to Amin’s regime (Mino 2011:67). In contrast to the Obote and Amin regimes, the current government, under Museveni, has taken significant steps to increase access to education with the enhancement of national identity as a central objective. Museveni’s regime focuses on two primary goals in providing mass education: economic growth and national unity. Both are emphasized, the former more than the latter, in the MoES’s Education Sector Strategic Plan 2004-2015. The Ugandan government, supported by international donors, has made tremendous strides towards achieving universal primary and secondary education. The government has taken responsibility for providing and administering a standardized nationalized education for Ugandans throughout the country (Mino 2011:67-69).

2.2.3 Educational structure

Uganda’s educational structure follows a four-level single-track system (including pre-primary education which I will not discuss here). Primary education consists of a seven-year course. Secondary education is at two levels; four years (S1-S4) in lower secondary course

(Ordinary level or O-level), and two-year (S5-S6) in upper secondary course (Advanced level or A-level). Technical Institutes and Farm schools run parallel to Ordinary level secondary school education (Kwesiga 2002:85).

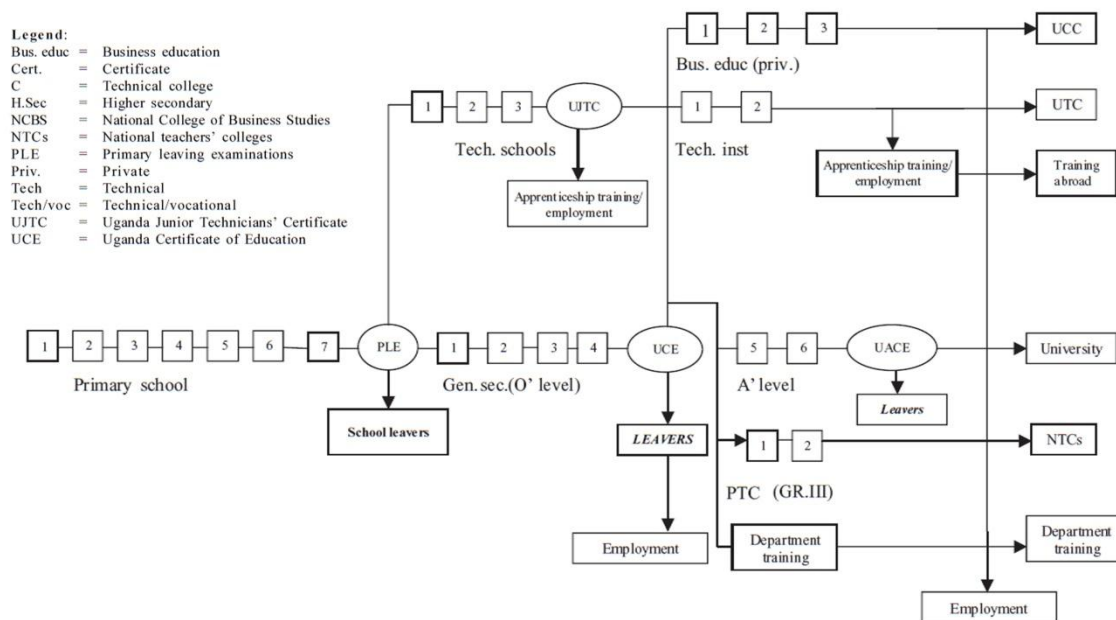


Figure 3 The structure of education in Uganda (source: UNESCO-IBE. World Data on Education 7th edition, 2010/11)

Most children start their education at the age of five or six at the nearest primary school. With normal annual progression primary school should last seven years (P1-P7), but many pupils drop out part way through and returns later, so it is not unusual to find teenagers sitting primary exams.

At the end of primary seven, pupils sit their first major national exams, the primary leaving examinations (PLE). The best possible mark pupils can achieve is a total of four (which means one point - a distinction - in each subject), while the worst is a total of 36 (nine points for each subject, which means a fail). Students with between four and 12 points pass the PLE with a first grade, or division one. Those with scores between 13 and 23 get a second grade; 24 to 29 get a third grade, while those with 30 to 34 pass with a fourth grade. The government

abolished tuition fees in public secondary schools in 2007 to increase access. However, only students who have scored 28 points or higher on their PLE can be admitted to the universal secondary education programme.

At the end of S4, students sit the second major national exams known as the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) or simply O-level examinations. Students who pass their O-level exams may progress to A-levels or the Higher School Certificate (HSC), after which students sit for the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) examinations, also known simply as A-levels.

2.2.4 Educational responsibility and financing

Since the introduction of UPE in 1997 and USE in 2007 the government has the main (official) responsibility for both primary and secondary education. However, there are also many private institutions run on a commercial basis and owned by groups or individuals and there are many expensive day and boarding private schools at all levels, where wealthier or more ambitious parents send their children.. The formal education sector is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Non-Formal Education (NFE) is mainly run by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

With the introduction of UPE in 1997 the government extended free education (at primary level) to four children per family. This was extended to full Universal Primary Education in 2003 with free access for all children. In 2007 Universal Secondary Education was introduced with tuition free secondary education as well. However, pupils on all levels, especially those in rural areas, face serious challenges to finishing their education even though it is free. For parents and pupils in the poorer areas money for additional school related expenses, like uniforms and scholastic materials (books and pens), are difficult to raise. Students also often have to study all day on empty stomachs since no meals are provided at school. And as mentioned above, although the government abolished tuition fees in public secondary schools in 2007, only students who have scored 28 points or higher on their PLE can be admitted to the universal secondary education programme.

2.2.5 Enrolment and retention

The survival rate to primary 7 (percentage of a pupil cohort actually reaching primary 7) is 67% for boys and 57% for girls, with an overall survival rate of 63%. It is estimated that of those who complete the primary cycle only 40% continue to post-primary institutions, and

that only 40% of those students enrolled in O-level secondary schools enter training institutions or A-level schools (Kwesiga 2002:90).

Several factors have been identified as contributing to low participation and completion in primary schooling, particularly for girls. These factors include poverty, the indirect costs of education (such as textbooks and uniforms, as well as the ‘cost’ for a family losing girls’ labour at home) and the effects of the AIDS epidemic. Other barriers to education included excluding pregnant girls or young mothers from school (despite the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy in sub-Saharan Africa) as well as safety and security issues – such as sexual harassment, gender-based violence and exploitation, corporal punishment, and insufficient latrines and sanitation facilities (these issues continue to afflict school environments especially in the poorer regions). However, in recognition of these issues, the Government of Uganda launched a National Girls’ Education Strategy in 2000 and took measures to raise the status of women and reduce the gender gap in all aspects of life. This included the creation of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; the establishment of the Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University; the promulgation of a National Action Plan for Women and a National Gender Policy (Chabbott 2010: 8).

In 2001 the Africa-wide Girls’ Education Movement (GEM), a major component of the African Girls’ Education Initiative being implemented by UNICEF, was launched in Uganda. GEM is a network of school-level clubs that help promote access to quality education for girls

2.2.6 Quality of education

Because of the decline in the economy, and persistent civil unrest (in the Northern region), the quality of education in Uganda deteriorated during the 90s and 2000s. Big classes continue to lower the quality of education, in urban and suburban schools, classes go beyond 100 pupils at primary level. In 2010, there were still not enough textbooks for all primary school children and school buildings (especially in rural areas) are very basic and sometimes non-exciting (under- a- tree schools). There is also a strong demand for improved teachers training and improved salaries for teachers. Especially in remote rural areas there is a great need for trained and skilled teachers.

2.2.7 Educational gender disparities

For both boys and girls, grade survival reduces with increased years of schooling. For example, only about 85 per cent of all children aged 10-19 years have completed P 5. The

implied dropout rate is relatively small in the early grades but accelerates at an increasing rate after grade 5. Gender disparities in school dropout do not occur until after grade 7. For example in rural Central (children aged 10-19) 70 per cent of boys had completed grade 7 in contrast to 66 per cent of girls. After grade 7, the gender gaps continuously widens with 60 per cent of boys having completed grade 11 compared to 50 per cent for girls. This suggests that gender gaps set in during the transition to secondary school (Ssewanyana and Kasirye 2010:12)

The 2000-2001 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey revealed that literacy rates of women were much lower than that of men, and that the gap between rural and urban areas is profound (for both sexes).

Table 1 Literacy levels by region (%)

Region	Women	Men
Central	69,8	76,4
Eastern	35,4	56,4
Northern	24,0	68,8
Western	46,6	53,3

Source: Derived from Kwesiga 2002 p. 95 (Table 5.3)

In general, girls perform less well in school than boys although a few high quality girls-only schools excel at the national level.

2.2.8 Socio-economic barriers to access to education

UNESCO'S publication "From access to equality" from 2012 addresses issues relating to girls' access to education focusing on challenges and solutions to cultural and structural barriers in society. Among other issues the publications looks at how gender disparities in access to secondary education can be tracked back to how families value the education of girls, as well as their economic means. When parents in low-income or poor households are weighing up which child to send to school, they often consider the economic and social benefits of educating a son as far outweighing those of educating a daughter, especially at

secondary level. A girl's immediate usefulness as a care provider for siblings, income contributor, or potential bride may be deemed more valuable than the uncertain return from her education. Although the social value of the male is judged to be higher than that of the female, this is not assumed to be the sole explanation of gender inequalities in education (Kwesiga 2002:5).

Pressure to conform to social norms and cultural expectations have also a heavy influence. Many parents fear their daughters will become alienated from traditional lifestyles and values, or not make good wives and mothers if they go to school. Parents also worry about the safety of their daughters traveling to and from secondary school.

In general life in a rural setting affects access to education for both boys and girls at the beginning of primary school, but by the later grades only girls are negatively affected. The reason for this disparity may be that in rural areas, as girls grow up, more demands are made on them to perform household tasks. Rural girls may also receive less encouragement to pursue their education as it is considered that they should prepare for marriage. Since a girl's allegiance after marriage usually belongs to the family of her future husband, the parents may further perceive that any investment in their daughter's education will be lost. Early pregnancies and early marriages also contribute to girls' lower completion and performance figures. In rural areas the school attendance situation is also strongly associated with inadequate and poor public health and education services, inefficient and inadequate transportation and communication facilities (Mukasa 2004: 97).

2.2.9 National policies, curriculum and schools' policies

According to the Ministry of education and sports annual performance report 2009/10 (ESAPR FY 2006/10 p. 129-130) various interventions has been undertaken in an effort to address Gender in education issues. Among the interventions undertaken during the period under review were:

- Formulation of gender policy in education
- Development of a road map to kick start on the process of drafting guidelines for teenage pregnancies and motherhood in school
- Enhancement of equitable access to secondary education
- Reform of curriculum to make it more gender sensitive

- Application of affirmative action during the appointment of personnel into the education service
- Implementation of gender based training in various universities
- Monitor the implementation of girl child policy
- Continue with the implementation of 1, 5 points to female students who qualify for university training.

Although the gender gap according to the report has greatly reduced (with girls' some places outweighing boys' in percentage of enrolment) during the past few years, girls still faces constraints and challenges. Socio-cultural factors like early marriages and early pregnancies, sexual harassment, and lack of gender sensitive sanitation facilities in schools still affect girls. In addition there are gender differences in the subject uptake most especially with science courses.

The primary level curriculum is silent about gender. It is composed of two volumes (Vol. 1 and Vol. 2). The aims and objectives of primary education are clearly stipulated in both the broad national aims of education and in the aims and objectives of primary education. The objectives address general educational concerns but ignore the question of promoting gender equity in education. The aims and objectives of secondary education in Uganda are largely devoted to obtaining civic achievements like national unity, economic development, and appreciating the cultural heritage. The current curriculum, and the national education aims and objectives make no mention of any efforts to correct the gender disparities in secondary education. The UNCDC is however in the process of revising the curriculum to make it more gender responsive (Muhwezi 2003:17). Partly for historical reasons the sub-Saharan Africa-region's educational system reflect the values and practices of the West in many instance. This has, and continues to have an influence on educational policies. The domesticating curriculum for women, when formal education was first introduced, and the division of subjects according to whether they are seen as suitable for boys or girls reflects entrenched beliefs: the belief that women belongs in a different sphere than men and that they cannot easily master science and mathematics has become embedded in the system over the years (Kwesiga 2002: 252).

All of the schools I studied showed awareness regarding girls' challenges within the education system, and they showed a great interest in recruiting girls to their schools.

Measures were made to ensure both higher enrolment figures and retention rates. However, traces of gender insensitivities could still be found in the formal rules and regulations for the schools. One rule set specifically states that pregnant girls will be faced with discontinuation; they will be expelled, and that “housewives” seeking admission in the school must declare their marital status. I found that in practice these regulations were not always followed to the letter and in some instances pregnant girls were encouraged to come back to school after the birth of their children. However, the existence of this type of rules suggests that these are still issues that affects girls and that these things are still part of the framework within which school representatives (and students) think. Also, on national level these rules are generally enforced and in some schools (especially single girls’ schools) unmarried teachers are advised to leave when they become pregnant because they are expected to be role models for the girls. There is no official policy on the right to education after pregnancy or on how to handle dropouts due to pregnancy. In addition, sexual abuse seems to persist in schools (Muhwezi 2003:18). Futhermore, as Okeke-Ihejirika (Abdi and Cleghorn 2005) argues, gaps in the national curriculum, which leave unanswered many questions about contradictions between the prospects of training and the traditional expectations of roles and responsibilities, contributes to sustaining stereotypes and inequality within the educational system.

2.3 Gender equity in Ugandan society

Uganda is a patriarchal society. This affects the lives of men and women differently. The inheritance system, the marriage and divorce laws, ownership of property, and the general status of men and women are guided by patriarchal values, which favour men. There is a clear male child preference. However, Uganda has made efforts in correcting existing gender imbalances. The new Constitution (1995) has many articles aimed at bringing about gender balance and women occupy important governmental positions. At the same time, in practical terms, the gender gap has hardly been narrowed. So, despite of apparent good will on the part of the state and an awareness of the need for gender equality by the citizens, the indicators show little change (Kwesiga 2002:104).

2.4 Religion

Religion can be a barrier to girls’ education. The denomination to which a girl or her parents belong to determines her access to schooling since if the nearest school is run by the wrong denomination, many parents consider it unsuitable (Kwesiga 2005:205). This affects girls

more than boys' since it is more likely that the boy will be allowed to travel to a school further away. A part from this the main influence of religion and religious practices on schooling seems to be indirect rather than direct. For instance Christian practice teaches values that place the concepts of motherhood at a level that makes higher education seem less important and therefore discourages girls in pursuing education on higher levels.

2.5 Education and development

Education is seen as an important instrument in achieving development. According to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), investing in education is the single most effective means of reducing poverty (GPE 2011). The global push for Universal Primary Education (UPE), as is reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All targets (EFA) has been an important development in international education work (Robeyns 2006). Education is seen as a human right and this has enabled a focus on access to school: "every child has the right to Free Primary Education" (FPE), as formulated in the second MDG. In addition to the MDGs, the EFA targets do not only strive for universal access to basic education, but for universal access to quality education and learning (Vermuelen 2013). In line with global movements, the Government of Uganda (GoU) has followed through on a policy of UPE since 1997. In 2007 GoU introduced Universal Secondary Education (USE), the first Sub-Saharan African country to do so. The Constitution of Uganda stipulates that education is a fundamental right for every citizen. It is essential for the country to provide quality and relevant education to all its citizens, irrespective of cultural, gender, regional or social differences (UNEB 2011). The implementation of UPE and USE both led to a significantly increase in school enrolment for both boys and girls. However, completion rates remain low overall, and lower for girls than boys; just one-third of the girls compared to half of the boys who enrolled in primary were still in school at the age of 18. Girls also constitute the largest proportion of out-of-school children in the population (UBOS, 2010) and lag behind boys in performance in national examinations (Ezati 2011:23-24).

3 Methods and methodology

The methods underlying this research come from the interpretive tradition. This implies a subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed. The main research strategies adopted are multiple participant observations (in two schools and in the local communities) and non-structured and semi-structured interviews, group discussion, documentation analysis.

The fieldwork was conducted during the period from October 2009 to November 2012. In addition to the field work correspondence has been maintained with the different informants and I have visited the informants on several occasions conducting follow-up interviews. I used focus groups of both teachers and students to get a better impression of their understanding and experiences regarding the research issues. I interviewed them both as groups and individually. Most everyday occurrences at the schools (lunch, classroom activities, sports and games, free-time, home life) and interviews were videotaped, sometimes with the stated intent of being part of a film series on education and sometimes as pure documentation recordings for further analysis and as ethnographic recordings of specific “customs” or happenings . Occurrences and interviews intended to be part of the film series were generally structured or more or less “planned”, with the students and teachers given time to prepare their answers, and usually filmed after discussions of the topics addressed in that particular segment of the films. The combination of video as documentation or ethnographic film and video as documentary or information film is complicated and raises some issues that will be explored more closely later on in this chapter.

When working in the field one is constantly deliberating how best to get hold of and generate research results that are capable of capturing the multiplicity and complexity that seem to characterize a specific society. Choice of method certainly has a crucial impact on the type of results that one’s research will end up with. My starting point has been methods within the relativistic and constructivist epistemological movements.

3.1 Data

Data collection was done through both secondary and primary sources. Primary data sources include the various informants, head counts performed at various schools, participant observations and responses to questionnaires. Secondary data sources mainly covered books, articles and government publication.

3.1.1 Secondary data

The secondary data research started with papers and books that described the basics of cultural studies, anthropological and sociological disciplines as well as books and articles directly addressing education issues both globally and in Uganda. These initial readings were mainly used to get an overview of the different matters regarding both research methods and the education situation. Later, the secondary data collected were more specifically related to the actual research topics and consisted mainly of other research into similar areas of interest and of statistical information and government plans in regard to education and girls' situation in Uganda.

My secondary sources consist for the greater part of books and articles about the education situation in Uganda and other East African countries and of statistical material provided by the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and the UN. Other sources are books, articles and websites provided both by NGO'S and government institutions including the Ministry of Education and Sports and regional education officials and institutions. Close attention is paid to ensure the reliability of the source, and websites have only been used if the source of the information is clear and considered reliable for the kind of information sought. Most websites used are either official websites of the governments or well established NGO's.

3.1.2 Primary data

Primary sources consist of a selection of informants (students, teachers, government workers and NGO'S).

My main informants are girls attending various schools (at secondary and university level) in the Central and Northern regions.

Apart from these girls other informants include teachers at different schools, other educational personnel and some parents and NGO workers.

The data was collected through participant observation, interviews (formal and informal), and focus group discussions.

3.1.3 Data collection and analysis

The main data techniques used in this study were semi-structured interviews, participant observation, group discussion (focus groups) and secondary source analysis. Participant

observation and personal interviews constituted the most important and valuable sources of information. Interpretive or qualitative research is conducted from an experience-near perspective, the researcher should not start with concepts determined a priori but rather seeks to allow these to emerge from encounters in the field, and supports a relativistic understanding of the phenomena being studied. Interpretive researchers see knowledge as a social construction (Walsham, 1993). There is no rigid separation between data collection and analysis, and the process is an interactive cycle of data collection and analysis, with the intention that the results of the analysis will help guide the subsequent collection of data. When conducting interpretive research it is generally accepted that researchers should interact directly and intensively with the subjects of their research over a period of time. The closer the researcher gets to the research subjects, the more complex and diverse the results of the research. I spent 18 months in the field, living at the schools and working alongside many of my informants, teaching classes the girls' attended and generally taking part in many aspects of everyday life. This means that the boundaries between me as a private person/researcher/colleague/teacher/filmmaker/observer/learner become blurred. The different roles can be described as being in a state of rapid flux, depending not only on who I am interacting with, but also on a complicated system of constantly changing settings for those interactions. I will discuss some aspects of this later in the chapter.

3.1.4 Fieldwork

3.1.4.1 Observation

Participant observation is the traditional anthropological field work method. The method is distinctive in that the researcher approaches participants in their own environment. Generally speaking, the researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like for an "insider" while remaining, inevitably, an "outsider." While in the field, researchers make careful, objective notes about what they see, recording all accounts and observations as field notes in a field notebook. Informal conversations and interactions with the study population are also important components of the method and should be recorded in the field book as accurately and detailed as possible. Most of my systematic observations were carried out in and around schools. In addition to writing I also recorded several of my observation settings on video.

3.1.4.2 Interviews

In interviews information is obtained through inquiry and recorded by the researcher. Structured interviews are performed by using survey forms, whereas open interviews are notes taken while talking with respondents. The notes are subsequently structured and interpreted for further analysis. I video documented most of my interviews which made the subsequent analysing easier and which limits the chance of misinterpretation when reviewing the material later. In a few instances the informants did not want to be interviewed on camera because they did not feel comfortable speaking “on the record”, in those cases the informants were anonymous and the interviews were recorded with sound only. Interviews are a part of most interpretive studies as a key way of accessing the interpretations of informants in the field (Walsham 2006:323).

Although interviews can be used to obtain almost any information, as with questionnaires, information is based on personal opinion. Data on school attendance, such as absentee days or reasons for absence, aspirations and thoughts on marriage for instance, are potentially subject to errors, due to poor estimates or intentional errors (correcting information that may reflect badly on the school, parents or students etc.) or of the informants wanting to give the interviewer the “right” answers.

3.1.4.3 Focus groups

Focus groups allow researchers to study people in a more natural conversation pattern than what typically occurs in a one-to-one interview. In combination with participant observation, they can in addition be used for learning about groups and their patterns of interaction. The main point with this kind of group is that it is and stays focused. The group has a specific discussion topic, and the group's task is to stay on it. The researcher's job as facilitator or group leader is to keep the group on course. The group's composition and the group discussion should be carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment, in which people are free to talk openly. Members should be actively encouraged to express their own opinions, and also respond to other members, as well as to questions posed by the leader. Because focus groups are structured and directed, but also expressive, they can yield a lot of information in a relatively short time. Responses in a focus group are spoken, and typically open-ended, relatively broad, and qualitative. Nonverbal communications and group interactions should as mentioned before also be observed. Focus groups may help the researcher get closer to what people are really thinking and feeling. I used focus groups to

narrow down my research field and to create clusters of informants among the various strata of potential informants groups (teachers, students). The focus groups are small (4-10 individuals) and composed of “representative” members of a group whose ideas, practices or opinions are pursued. By asking initial questions and structuring the subsequent discussion, the researcher can obtain, for example, information on common practices among parents like responses to government regulations or opinions about girls’ education in general. Group members include the random selection of a small number of representative individuals, who agree to be available over an extended period – in this case one to two years. However, in this study both the term “representative” and “random selection” are subject to criticism since it involved those students or teachers that were willing to participate in the project, those willing to talk in front of a camera and willing to let me follow them (in all kinds of situations) for a year or even two (which was the initial agreement in regards the girls in the main focus group). See chapter 3.2 for more information regarding these issues.

3.2 Main methods of research

I apply aspects of both relativistic and constructivist research methods in this study, focusing on the research subjects’ perspectives but also on presenting a detailed description of what is being researched.

3.2.1 Constructivist research

How is meaning socially constructed? What conditions and construct self-representation and identity? In this paper the investigation focuses on people’s actual lives. How is culture verbalised in an educational situation? What are the girls’ own thoughts on “being a girl”. The research method focuses on ambiguity and complexity-production (Løngreen 2006:123-125). The focus of this type of research is to deconstruct truths, and by truths is meant the concepts and ideas the research subject’s themselves hold (although these ideas might not be manifested to the subjects themselves). The method is dominated by the subjects’ perspectives and the result is not known beforehand but will be created through analysis.

3.2.2 Relativistic research

The theoretical interest linked to this method (see Chapter 4 for more on this) is to gain access into life worlds through qualitative research interviews. The amount of data forms the basis for interpretation. What characterises this method is the analysing of data based on an

interpretive process (Løngreen 2006:122). Clifford Geertz (1973) talks about “thick description” which is about presenting as dense and saturated description of what is being researched as possible. Within this method a combination of data collection strategies like focus groups, participant observation and qualitative interviews are applied; usually with interplay between data collection and analysis (data collected from participant observation could be basis for later interviews and so on).

An important element here for me was to test my interpretations among the girls to make sure that the interpretations emerging from my research was recognisable by them.

3.3 Ethics

The kind of fieldwork conducted in this research imposes many challenges when it comes to providing an objective picture of a cultural reality. All the information gathered in any kind of field work is filtered through the researchers’ impressions and their biases inherent in theoretical orientation, research strategy, social status, and individual background and personality. I will look further into these issues in the following sub chapter.

One of the paradoxes in the use of ethnographic methods, and in particular participant observation is that on the one hand fieldwork is viewed as superficial, conducted by an outsider who will inevitably leave the community of interest. On the other hand, to conduct a successful study requires a level of intimacy considered by some to be excessive.

Furthermore, this intimacy with the research subjects lead to ethical dilemmas concerning what, and how, to report. How do researchers determine what should be published and what should remain undisclosed? It is the task of the researcher to make judgments that will neither unduly distress the subject nor misrepresent the study's findings. It is important to remember that researchers have an obligation both to keep the purpose of their inquiry forefront in their minds, and to control the extent of their exploration. One does not have a license to tell all.

3.3.1 Research bias

“The manner in which the fieldworker presents her or his 'self' ... is a major aspect of the ethical implications of field work” (Chiseri-Strater1996:116)

All researchers are positioned by age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical/personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition. The extent to which such influences are revealed or concealed when reporting data is circumscribed by the paradigms and disciplines under which the researchers train, work, and publish. For ethnographers, writing about how they are positioned is part of the data (Chiseri-Strater 1996:115). Clifford Geertz (Chiseri-Strater 1996:119) has explained that positioning oneself during the field experience is subsequently connected to positioning oneself in the written ethnography: *Finding somewhere to stand in a text that is supposed to be at one and the same time an intimate view and a cool assessment is almost as much of a challenge as gaining the view and making the assessment in the first place*

My relationship with my informants and particularly the girls is part of the research context and most likely influences the results. Living within the specific setting that is “boarding school” and participating in everyday events and chores meant that my presence became a more or less natural part of the students’ school lives. They saw me and talked to me most days and our researcher-informant discussions often touched on personal connections between me and them, and most likely affected how they began to see gender and access to education as an issue. My stories about Norway, my own education history and me being both a science teacher and a filmmaker (both typically male-dominated occupations) visibly influenced some of the girls’ perceptions of what it entails to “be a girl”, as did my status as unmarried without children. Our relationship also gave them an additional interested audience for discussions of ideas about norms, values, careers, attitudes and their lives in general. My close identification with the girls rather than the education system and the “outsider” category I represented made me an ally and non-threatening. The students could tell me things that they normally would not discuss or tell anyone (grown-up or teacher). This status influenced my relationship with the teachers at the schools who for one thing did not always agree with the teacher-student relationship I represented and who also found it hard to “place” me within the collegial group and did not understand my constant prioritising of attending student-events rather than teacher-events, like taking my lunch with the students etc. By focusing more on filming rather than teaching and by constantly carrying my camera around my role shifted towards a more acceptable category where doing those kinds of things were considered more reasonable.

The following constitutes a list of some biases regarding this fieldwork.

Informant selection: it is obviously impossible to state that the information collected from the interviews is fully representative of all possible experiences, or even taps the predominant

cultural perspective. Uganda is a country of more than 30 million people and my sample of 30 or so informants can only speak for themselves and their own perspectives on what the general opinion regarding these issues are. I worked with a relative small group of informants, predominantly from Kampala-based middleclass people- although I also travelled to rural areas and interviewed students and teachers with different backgrounds (I considered this to be important as most of the Ugandan population live in rural areas and not in the cities). I also had to select my informants on the basis of willingness to appear on camera, on availability etc.

Field location: a researcher needs to develop a field identity and/or role and make intensive first hand observations within a single community, which is usually only a small component of the total cultural community and social matrix under consideration. Yet the researcher will (most likely) generalize about this totality from a relatively microcosmic view. This perspective neglects variations in traits, patterns, and values that are often present within a culture. The focus on a single location also limits the extent to which the researcher can recognize significant influences that are present on wider regional or national levels. My microcosmos was largely made up of two schools and the above mentioned middleclass strata of Ugandan society, my informants were also all either educators, students or in the education line of work and any generalizations based on the views and perspectives of these people would be neglecting the largely rural, non-educated population.

Personal biases: the researchers' personalities, cultural orientations, social statuses, political philosophies, and life experiences will always to some degree colour how they interpret other cultures.

Time frame: I spent 18 months in Uganda and my ideas and opinions are largely based on what I saw and experienced during that time, the specific context of living there at that specific time (2009-2011) and on how well I got to know people. How long does it take to really get to know and understand a community – and to gain people's trust? Uganda is culturally very different from Norway and my understanding of the cultures, norms and values are largely drawn from books, other research, conversation with people and my interpretations of what was going on.

Video recordings: One disadvantage of video-recording interviews is that it may make the interviewee less open or less truthful than it would have been without the camera present.

Language: It is clearly better to be able to speak the local language fluently in order to carry out field research. However, this is not possible in all cases. In Uganda the official language is English, but there are several different local languages. English is the language used in schools and many of the schools forbid their students to speak local languages on the school grounds. However, in rural areas a lot of the people speak little or no English and when travelling in those areas I used an interpreter.

Ethical issues and tension: some areas of concern: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. Here the researcher may struggle with many grey areas. One is often unsure about potential harm, cannot always enable fully informed consent, do sometimes invade some elements of privacy, and may ‘deceive’ about the precise aim of one’s research. These ‘transgressions’ are normally justified on the teleological grounds of getting the research done properly, but there is a fine line here. I have tried to be as open as possible about my research, about the films and the aims and objectives of both. But as I lived with these people for almost two years and got to know them well, some have become good friends. As mentioned earlier the line between researcher, filmmaker, teacher and private person have become blurred and it is difficult to know in what respect that has influenced the informants, and my research.

Most of my informants were willing to speak on camera and signed release documents attesting that their interviews could be used in the documentary and for other purposes including this research. Furthermore, since some of the girls were below 18 years of age when I started the fieldwork, although they consented to participate in the study, their parents’ consent was also required and obtained. I also had permission from the head masters at the various schools to conduct field work, film and interview students on campus. However, some informants did not want to speak on camera but agreed for the information obtained to be used in the research. Thus, in order to respect principles of anonymity and to maintain a consistent style in the text, no names of schools, teachers, students or others will be mentioned throughout the thesis.

3.4 Methodological reflections

“What sort of scientists are they whose main technique is sociability and whose main instrument is themselves?”(Geertz 2000: 94)

How does my worldview, my educational and professional background, influence the selection of my research topic and methodology? These are questions any researcher should ask themselves at the beginning of and throughout a study. The distortions or preconceptions researchers' unintentionally and unawares introduce to their projects are especially critical in ethnographic research where interviewers take extraordinary efforts to establish strong relationships with their informants in order to delve deeply into the subject matter.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the asymmetrical relationship between researcher and informant and speculate on the ways the various interactions between the two may become tinted by presumptions (on both parts) arising from such things as age, gender, and race, or socio-economic status and cultural background.

Berger and Luckmann (1967, in Isotalus 2006:227) state in their sociology theory that realities are constructed, and therefore the experience of reality varies.

In my case it is quite clear to me that my mixed role as at the same time filmmaker and researcher, in both respects working along very similar lines and gathering much of the same information, influenced the way I acted and to some degree was decisive in my choice of methods. However, most of the interviews conducted for the research are not part of the film and vice versa as the methods for attaining and presenting information differs quite a lot between the two fields. Usually the film interviews were conducted after the research interviews because on film it is important to get short and confident answers and it is easier to attain this if the subject has already been discussed to some degree. The film interviews are also more directly guided and focused on whatever part of the film they are supposed to underscore and enrich and hence in some cases considered too guided to be relied on within the research context. However, when travelling throughout the country, visiting school and interviewing stakeholders, most of the interviews were one offs and I had to try to combine the two roles. Furthermore, by working at the schools as teacher and assistant teacher I gained access to students and teachers in yet another capacity (and was offered opportunities for participant observations from both sides of the classroom) and this third role also helped legitimising me being there. As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter my close connection with the informants, and the very blurred lines between the various roles, must have influenced my research and my focus.

The problems of ethnographic objectivity identified here and in previous sub-chapters have led some anthropologists to conclude that unbiased research is impossible and that all ethnography is subjective. Postmodern anthropologists take this position one step further and

argue that ethnography is fiction and is to be evaluated on the basis of literary form as well as scientific principles.

However, although perfect objectivity may not be attainable, it can be approximated. Through clearly defined methods, scientific standards and procedures researchers must try to achieve as impartial a perspective on cultural data as possible. It is also essential to acknowledge and clearly discuss sources of bias when reporting research results. In combination with quantitative methods one can also achieve broader if not generalized insights into the different areas of research. Although people perspectives and opinions are their own and not everyone else's, one may grant that at least some of the ideas presented by the informants have value in terms of finding possible answers to varied customs and ways of behaviour within a society.

Also, as researchers we can be reflexive in our handling of the research material. Turning in upon ourselves as researchers makes us look subjectively and reflexively at how we are positioned. Turning in upon ourselves prevents us from removing our selves from our research process, from our connections with our informants, or from our written translation of data to text (Chiseri-Strater 1996:119)

3.4.1 Validation and reliability

The term validity refers to how well the measuring instruments in a study fill the demand to measure what it means to measure. Reliability is a measure of how well the study actually measures what it is supposed to measure and is concerned with the replicability of scientific findings. Validity is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings and of determining the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality.

The value of scientific research is partially dependent on the ability of individual researchers to demonstrate the credibility of their findings. Regardless of the discipline or the methods used for data collection and analysis, all scientific ways of knowing strive for authentic results. In all fields that engage in scientific inquiry, reliability and validity of findings are important. A common criticism directed at ethnographic and other qualitative investigations is that it fails to adhere to standards of reliability and validity (Le Compte and Gouts1982 :31-32). When using a qualitative, time-intensive research approach like participant observation it is normally not possible to conduct the study again in order to see if the same results were to

be obtained, nor may this be a meaningful testing device for deciding reliability and validity in this type of research.

Ethnographic research differs from positivistic research, and its contributions to scientific progress lie in these differences. Typical dissimilarities from positivistic approaches involve data gathering that necessarily precedes hypothesis formulation and revision, and focus on descriptive investigation and analysis. Through admitting the subjective experiences of participants and investigator into the research frame, ethnography may provide a depth of understanding lacking in other approaches to investigation. But how may the researchers maintain reliability within such a personalistic context? Ethnographers may enhance the reliability of their data by recognizing and handling five major problems (Le Compte and Gouts 1982: 36-37): researcher status position, informant choices, social situations and conditions, analytic constructs and premises, and methods of data collection and analysis. I explored some of these issues in regard to this study earlier in this chapter.

It is important to keep in mind that the ethnographic process is personalistic; no ethnographer works just like another and although the subsequent problems of reliability sometimes threaten the credibility of ethnographic works, validity may be the methods major strength.

The ethnographer's common practice of living among participants and collecting data for long periods of time provides opportunities for continual data analysis and comparison. Also, informant interviewing, a major ethnographic data source, is necessarily phrased more closely to the empirical categories of participants and is formed less abstractly than instruments used in other research designs. Third, participant observation, the ethnographer's second key source of data, is conducted in natural settings that reflect the reality of the life experiences of participants more accurately than do contrived settings. Finally, ethnographic analysis incorporates a process of researcher self-monitoring, termed disciplined subjectivity, which exposes all phases of the research activity to continual questioning and re-evaluation.

3.4.2 Informants and field

3.4.2.1 The schools

The field consisted of the various schools involved in the research. I visited several schools across the country but was most closely connected to three schools in the Central region where I spent considerable amount of time, staying at one in intervals of several weeks. One school was vocational whereas the others were either academic or comprehensive (meaning

that they cover both academic and vocational subjects). The school where I spent most time is a mixed boarding school.

3.4.2.2 Informants

In the following I will present some biographical data on the main informants, the girls, to better understand their experiences of schooling, the problems they faced, their aspirations and what encouraged them to stay in school.

Main informants:

- Pe (17), Ma (17), La (17) and Es (16)

These four girls studied and lived together at a boarding school. They all did academic subjects. Pe and Ma were very determined and focused on academic achievements. Ma wanted to study medicine in Europe and Pe wanted to do either mechanical or electrical engineering preferably in the USA and she was hoping to win a scholarship. Ma had three sisters and her parents were both doctors and lived in Europe (the sisters were at various boarding schools or at university), Pe came from a lower middle-class household in Kampala, she was the youngest of five children and all her siblings had tertiary levels of education. Her father died when she was young and her mother supported the family through a small hairdressing business. Pe depended on scholarships to get through school and she was a dedicated student. La came from a middle class family and was very religious. She did not yet know what she wanted to do with her life but had decided she would study law when she finished secondary school as this would lead to a variety of options in regard work. She was also a musician and singer-songwriter and hoped sometime in the future to be able to live from something related to the music business, maybe as a lawyer. Es was younger than the others and came from a middle class family. She was the youngest in her family and she grew up much protected by her parents and siblings. She referred to herself as the baby in the family and said she looked forward to gaining some independence.

- Wi (17)

Wi was the only girl in her class the vocational school where she was studying carpentry. She came from a poor family and had to work as a school dependent and raise money elsewhere to get through school. She wanted to do carpentry because there was more money to be made in that field than in traditional female occupations as hairdressing or dressmaking. She also enjoyed making things and working outdoors. She wanted to live in town and she was very

determined that she should be financially independent and that she had to provide for her mother and siblings in the village. Her mother was a Rwandan refugee who had come to Uganda in 1994.

- LE (23)

LE came from a lower middle class family but her father became ill and had to stop working leaving them with very little money. She had to support herself through school from P5. She was lucky and was taken on as a school dependent and later received some help from an organisation called FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) an NGO which support female children through school through scholarships and other work. She studied at the university at the time of the study.

The other informants were girls and teachers from various schools in the Central and Northern area of Uganda.

4 Theoretical framework

4.1 What is culture?

“Let us never cease from thinking – what is this “civilization” in which we find ourselves?”

Virginia Woolf (1936:62)

The concept of culture was initially a product of positivistic theory and equalled nation, habits and rituals. Culture was something one was born into and something one could measure. This concept of culture was challenged by the hermeneutic paradigm. Culture had to be something other than merely an epistemological category; culture constituted systems of meaning and significance created by people interacting with each other. Clifford Geertz (1973) broke new ground within this perspective of culture. The emphasis shifted to a cultural world not seen as a container or a superstructure embracing human beings, but rather a cultural interpretation that has become realized, materialized, and enacted by the people who share it together. It is lived, experienced, and assigned with meanings and values in the process of being interpreted, understood, and appreciated (Svane 2006:41). Methodically, attention turned towards human relations and the meaning and significance created in these. It was only possible to gain access into the concept of culture if one had access to people’s life worlds (Løngreen 2006: 117). The challenges of globalisation brought about a destabilisation of the culture definition. When research focused on nations and national differences, it was understandable to perceive culture as entities, both as national entities as well as homogeneities. Today we refer to culture in the plural, and one sees a shift of focus from ethnicity to identity. Along with globalisation came complexity and equivocation, and an emphasis on networks and culture as a social organisation of perspectives. Hannerz (1992:9-13) argues that the individual’s perspective or the individual’s share or version of socially organized meaning, is in large part a product of her network experience. He says that the greater variety and the less density there is in ego-centred networks, the more different the perspectives will be and that not only do perspectives differ depending on from where one see things; one may also see variously far. With different perspectives go different horizons. What is right for one person is wrong for another, not just generally speaking, but also in relation to the same social context. The way an individual expresses him or herself, and the way in which him or her is positioned within a concrete social context, means that research redirects its focus from relation to individual and how identity is constructed. This shift acknowledges that culture is not homogenous or merely heterogeneous, but is constructed (Løngreen 2006:118). Culture as a concept is depended on

and affected by social context (one may say it becomes one of many significant categories like gender, age, religion etc.) and becomes a construction that emerges through analysis. If the research approach is constructivist, culture emerges through analysing social context using specific frameworks defined through theory. In the case of this study the focus would be on how education- culture is constructed through gender (or rather how gender is constructed through education- culture).

4.1.1 Relationship between culture, social structures and the individual-in-action

Social structures refer to institutionalised and social interaction patterns. According to Giddens, the social structures are the institutionalised patterns of behaviour that are repeated in social relations among the actors. They reflect the same type of actions (routines, habits, and procedures) repeated in the same type of situations in the same type of relations. As an outcome of these situations or processes a social structure emerges. Structures are thus not to be conceived of as a form (like in the classical anthropological tradition), but rather as an on-going organising process that organises social relations and interactions between individuals. They can be understood as a network of social relations that is maintained and manifested in the continuously repeated interaction patterns (Geertz 1973, Svane 2006:43). The social structures however, involve more than just interaction patterns. They also include the institutionalised roles and role relations and the social organising of tasks, activities, power, and responsibilities, rights and duties (Svane 2006:43). The social structures thus include the institutionalised social system that the actors are part of; one may say that actors are the social structures and to be part the system implies that the actors possess the social knowledge and skills that follow from taking on a specific institutionalised role; like that of “student”, “teacher” or “girl”

Culture acquires its legitimisation power through tradition and customs. What is inherited and sanctioned by tradition and custom, gains authority that has power over attitudes, interpretations, and behaviour of the human being within their specific settings. Values and meanings, artefacts and behavioural patterns are learned, experienced, and transmitted through the cultural tradition and customs in a historical on-going process. Legitimation concerns the process of explaining and justifying the organising and functioning of the interaction network and is an essential process in the maintenance and transmission of the

institutionalised network through time. The values are legitimised when some ways of acting are preferred or considered more appropriate than other actions in different types of situations and types of relations. Thus values prescribe the appropriate and normative behaviour of the members of an institution. In addition, values also inform and legitimise assessments, decisions, and priorities. Another dimension of the legitimising process is that of meaningful narratives or stories that are produced about the institutionalised network. These stories are told about the institution to explain it and pass it on to further generations or to newcomers. They explain and justify why things are done in a certain way and why the institutionalised network is structured in a particular way (Svane 2006:45). Legitimization, together with socialisation, is an essential process that makes the actor become a cultural member of the social system and this is an on-going process.

The social structures and culture are inter-subjective and they are grounded and rooted in the social interaction between individuals. Thus, changes in the social structures and in culture can only occur with the involvement of the individuals-in-interaction. Only through interaction and experience can the social and cultural structures become contested or challenged (Svane 2006: 45-46)

4.2 Theories of women and inequalities

4.2.1 Feminism

Feminists throughout history have identified education as a critical arena for their emancipation and for social justice (Purvis 1994:137). The theories put forward here are mainly based on analysis of Western societies. However, they still provide relevant pointers towards discovering the roots of gender inequalities in Uganda (and in the wider Sub-Saharan African region). Both colonisation and the evangelisation process at the turn of the nineteenth century, as well as the introduction and grounding of the capitalist mode of production and the current globalisation of the world economies means that Western influences cannot be ignored and imported social theories have both indirect and direct bearing on understanding gender roles and access to education in Uganda (Kwesiga 2002:14).

The feminist perspective has much in common with the conflict perspective. However, instead of focusing broadly on the unequal distribution of power and resources, feminist sociology studies power in its relation to gender. This topic is studied both within social structures at large and at the micro level of face-to-face interaction, the latter of which

incorporates the methodology of symbolic interactionism (popularized by Erving Goffman). At the core of feminist theory is the idea that, in most societies, women have been systematically oppressed and that men have been historically dominant (Boundless 2014).

Feminist thought has a rich history, and is categorized into three waves. At the turn of the century, the first wave of feminism, focused on official, political inequalities and fought for women's suffrage. In the 1960s, the second wave of feminism, also known as the women's liberation movement, turned its attention to a broader range of inequalities, including those in the workplace, the family, and to reproductive rights. Currently, a third wave of feminism is criticizing the fact that the first two waves of feminism were dominated by white women from advanced capitalist societies. This movement emphasizes diversity and change, and focuses on concepts such as globalization, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism (Boundless 2014). Postmodern feminists reject the claim that there is a grand theory that can explain the position of women in society, or that there is any single, universal category that is "woman". Postmodern feminist have stressed the importance of "deconstruction" and in particular, they have sought to deconstruct male language and a masculine view of the world (Giddens 2009:620-621).

A short look at three major strands of feminism:

- 1) Liberal feminism: looks for explanations of gender inequalities in social and cultural attitudes. They tend to focus on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for women through legislation and other democratic means. They are criticised for their unsuccessful dealings with the root causes of gender inequalities (Giddens 2009: 616)
- 2) Socialist feminism: developed from Marx's conflict theory. Has been critical to liberal feminism for its inability to see that there are powerful interests in society hostile to equality for women (Giddens 2009:616).
- 3) Radical feminism: belief that men are responsible for and benefit from the exploitation of women (Giddens 2009:617).

4.2.2 Social constructionism

The idea of social construction of gender comes out of the general school of thought entitled social constructionism. Social constructionism proposes that everything people "know" or see as "reality" is partially, if not entirely, socially situated.

A social constructionist view of gender looks beyond categories and examines the intersections of multiple identities and the blurring of the boundaries between essentialist categories. This is especially true with regards to categories of male and female, which are viewed typically as binary and opposite, here social constructionism seeks to blur the binary and muddle these two categories.

Judith Butler argues for *gender performativity*. She says that gender is not an essential category. The repetitious performances of "male" and "female" in accordance with social norms reifies the categories, creating the appearance of a naturalized and essential binary. Gender is never a stable descriptor of an individual, but an individual is always "doing" gender, performing or deviating from the socially accepted performance of gender stereotypes. Doing gender is not just about acting in a particular way. It is about embodying and believing certain gender norms and engaging in practices that map on to those norms. These performances normalize the essentialism of gender categories (Boundless 2014). Butler also deploys psychoanalysis to discuss how regulatory norms are invested with psychic power through process of identification. Like Foucault, she argues that discourse defines, constructs and produces bodies as objects of knowledge. Discourse is the means by which we understand what bodies are (Barker 2008:298).

4.2.3 Subjectivity and gender

For Foucault, subjectivity is a discursive production. That is, discourse offers speaking persons subject positions from which to make sense of the world. In doing so, discourse also "subjects" speakers to the rules and discipline of those discourses. A subject position is that perspective or set of regulative discursive meanings from which discourse make sense. To speak is to take up a subject position and to be subjected to the regulatory power of that discourse (Barker 2008:291). Foucault argues that being a man or woman is not the outcome of biological determinism or universal cognitive structures or cultural patterns. Gender to Foucault is historically and culturally specific, subject to radical discontinuities over time and across space and we are gendered through the power of regulated and regulatory discourse (ibid). Julia Kristeva has argued that although one may identify with gendered identities one cannot *be* a woman in an essentialist ontological sense. Sexual identities as opposites can only come into being after entry into the symbolic order and that sexual identity is not an essence but a matter of representation (Barker 2008:298).

4.2.4 Gender and education

Social theories of gender inequalities, their assumptions and explanations, can be applied to the question of educational access. For example, the *functionalist* approach can relate to the supposition that sexes have different needs, interests and vocations and that therefore courses and subject arrangements should reflect these. The *radical-feminist* approach relates to female under-representation and evident male control of and dominance in educational structures. The *social learning* theory can be applied to show how pupils, teachers and parents accept some gender-specific social issues, such as divisions of labour, as if they were inbuilt. The *psychoanalytic* approach can show how female pupils may be influenced by and not identify with the dominant male personnel within the educational system (Kwesiga 2006:22).

In the book *Issues in African Education* (Abid and Cleghorn (ed) 2005) Philomina Okeke-Ihejirika explores the ideological content of African women's training, and the various ways it might be implicated in the struggle to achieve gender equity especially at the tertiary level of education. By "ideological content" she refers to the gendered hierarchies in the administrative and academic structures of these institutions which she suggests convey to students crucial information about the status quo in place. She also emphasises the environment in which learning takes place which, in many ways, reflects the dynamics of social relations in the larger society. What individuals learn at primary and secondary schools, but especially in tertiary education, is according to Okeke-Ihejirika, not limited only to the curriculum content of academic and professional programs. In fact, much of the learning experiences, which shape an individual's worldview and fashion them into full adults, are not contained in the formal curriculum. Rather, the dynamics of institutional life, the rules of social relations, and the hierarchies they embed, prepare the individual for future challenges as full-fledged adults. Furthermore, African women's marginal status in academia makes them vulnerable targets in a patriarchal arrangement with clearly defined hierarchies. When women work in exclusion for the most part, as academics and researchers, their own academic freedom is curtailed even further. Given their dismal representation in the senior ranks of tertiary education staff, African women are not in any way equipped to push for policy changes that increase women's access to and representation at this level.

4.3 Postcolonial theory

"How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the 'other')?" (Said 1978)

Edward Said (1994: 4) underlined the relationship between empire, geography and culture, suggesting that these were drawn together by “overlapping territories and intertwined histories”. He states that *even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no way in which the past can be quarantined from the present*. Historically, Western societies have found in “Africa” a radical other for their construction of civilisation, enlightenment, progress, development, modernity and history (Ferguson 2006:2). Today, for all that has changed, “Africa” continues to be described through a series of lacks and absences, failings and problems, plagues and catastrophes. Various developments within postcolonial theory have sought to explore the place of the West and its defining influence in forging the post-colony, underlining that neither the former nor the latter could be reified. Postcolonial theory has been particularly conscious of breaking down imperial binaries that privilege the West as the progenitor of progress and the post-colony as the repository of backwardness and underdevelopment. Furthermore, the notion that there is a singular modernity has been widely criticised (Ahluwalia 2010:161).

Michel Foucault’s work has been highly influential within post-colonial studies. His analysis of power, authority, modes of surveillance and governmentality have been vital to understanding the dynamics of the colonial world (Ahluwalia 2010:147). Foucault’s discourse describes the particular kind of language which specialised knowledge has to conform to in order to be regarded as true (for instance specialised medical discourse, computer discourse etc.). According to Foucault, discourse always involves a form of violence in the way it imposes its linguistic order in the world: knowledge has to conform to the discourse’s paradigms in order to be recognised as legitimate. Following Foucault, Said argued that Orientalism was less a body of objective academic knowledge but rather a discursive construction, whose conceptual structure determined the way in which the West understood the East (Young 2007:2). Orientalism, as Said defines it, was a relationship of power, of cultural domination, the cultural equivalent of the colonialism which it accompanied. In Foucault’s words; *it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together* ([1978] 1990:100).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus emerged from the depths of the disintegrated colonial world. For Bourdieu, habitus represented a *set of embodied durable dispositions that tends to reproduce the society that produced it*. Habitus is a generating principle that is best described as "social practice" where an individual's history or past experiences are inscribed, where the past continues to effect the present. The manner in which one thinks, the perspectives adopted, the patterns of perception, the values and mores that define a particular society, are all part of the habitus. Habitus, to Bourdieu, was a means to explain the manner in which subjects adapted to the structures that were inherent in their particular social framework. The concept of habitus are only defined within the theoretical system which gave them meaning in the first place and these concepts are most clearly manifested in the body where the social framework, our class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, becomes activated through practice which tends towards the reproduction of the social framework. The social world is inscribed in the body and the habitus represents the internalisation of the social order, which in turn reproduces the social order (Ahluwalia 2010:142-143). The concept of field is the objective complement to the idea of habitus. Fields, as defined by Bourdieu, are relational structures representing a collection of differing social positions often competing for power. Classrooms may be seen and analysed as fields, and so may the entire school or even the education system. Another important concept in Bourdieu's theory is what he labels "symbolic violence". This is a kind of "programming" by the system (the dominating group) of dominated social groups, who then consider the social order as legitimate.

Both Bourdieu's concept of field and habitus and Foucault's power relation explorations will be used in the analysis of the data in chapter 5. Foucault is mainly used as a way of examining the way that power operates within everyday relations between people and institutions (in this case the girls, the schools and the broader social context). Habitus and field are analysed in relation to how subjects adapt to the structures inherent in their particular social framework (in this case school life).

Another issue that runs through particularly feminist post-colonial theories is the role of patriarchy as a concept that explains the subordination of women. Zalabata (1998) argues that women have lost the status and role they used to enjoy in pre-colonial times, and that it is the patriarchal ideology introduced by colonisation and Christianisation that is largely responsible for the marginalisation and subordination of women in the former colonised world. Zalabata (1998), says that the real problem lies not in being male or female citizens but that there exists

a dominating system, a system which is standardising everyone, and that this standardisation entail a loss of values both for indigenous men and women in the postcolonial world.

4.4 Social learning theory

The social learning theory (conceptualised by Albert Bandura in 1977) is considered to be one of the most influential theories of learning and development. While embedded in many of the basic concepts of traditional learning theory, Bandura believed that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning. His theory added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviours by observing other people. Known as observational learning (or modelling), this type of learning can be used to explain a wide variety of behaviour. The social learning theory suggests that people imitate behaviour that they observe in models that are similar to themselves, and it suggests that behaviour that is rewarded is likely to be repeated. The main way that gender behaviours are learned is through the process of observational learning. Children observe the people around them behaving in various ways, some of which relate to gender. If there are few or no available models similar to the girls, that is if there are no female teacher or other role models in a school context, the girls will experience “negative” learning – they will not learn that being in school or studying a particular subject is “for them”. That being said, girls (and boys) are not just passively letting gender norms wash over them. Children and teenagers are constantly active in the matter and may take up the gender divisions supplied by adults or strongly reject them, criticise them and aim for something different (Namakula 2009:12).

Social learning theory as conceptualised by Bandura focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context (Bandura, 1977). Underlining that learning does not merely occur within the learner, but that it is an interactive process between the learner and her environment. Environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behaviour. Bandura suggests that an individual’s behaviour and the environment operate in a three-way relationship during learning, mutually influencing each other, determining human behaviour (McGregor 2009:3). In relation to gender in education the three main determinants could be presented like this: Firstly, *Personal determinants*, also known as ‘cognitive factors’ which includes an individual’s attitudes, anticipated outcomes/ expectations, intentions, self-standards, self-efficacy, emotions, abilities/skills to pay attention, learn, evaluate and imitate as well as personal knowledge. They also include biological factors like sex and age. Secondly, *behavioural determinants*, which here refer to what an individual chooses to do or

not to do. This includes the girls' actual actions. For example the choice of one education path over another, imitation of other girls' actions, their personal responses to gender based critiques, their strategies (whether positive or negative) in regard to dealing with various gender-based challenges. Thirdly, *environmental determinants*, which in this setting refer to all the factors that exist within an individual's social context. This includes social norms and values, the actions of significant others like parents, teachers, siblings and peers. The school environment, rural or urban, boarding or day-school, socio-economic background and government policies and campaigns regarding education, the media and other arenas that contributes to social learning (Namakula 2009:7-9).

In this study the focus is not on considering all the reciprocal relations among the three determinants. Rather, I focus on mapping the reciprocal relationship between some kinds of environmental determinants and personal determinants as perceived by the informants (boarding school/day school, rural/urban, socio-cultural background etc.) However, I also consider the informants to be active agents in their various social contexts, the girls are not just passive recipients of established and expected gender roles, but are actively challenging, constructing and discussing alternatives within the various contexts they find themselves.

5 Empirical findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical findings and the analysis of the data collected from the selected schools. The main sources are several semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers, head teachers and students, focus groups with students and my own observations in schools and classrooms. The analysis is divided into two main sections: The first section outlines teachers' notions of education and gender. The second section is dedicated to students' perspectives. Each section is organised thematically and presents viewpoints on a wide range of issues from the actual practices at school level, including school policies, school culture and classroom practices, to teachers' and students' opinions on what it is like to be female in the education system. They also offer ideas for change, and discuss current barriers towards an equal system of education.

The data collected is analysed against the background of the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 4, and the wider local and national context described in Chapter 2. Each sub-chapter describes and analyses the data. At the end of each section (unless they are very short) I summarise and highlight major findings. The chapter concludes with an analyses and comparison of the different actors' view on the various issues presented.

5.1 Perspectives on gender and education

Perspectives on what it means to be a girl in the education system is expressed in the general knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are regarded as important for girls or women. Different perspectives and therefore different objectives exist within teachers' and students' minds. This chapter presents perspectives from the different actors' point of view. As a framework for the girls' situation within the Ugandan education system, the first section examines the teachers' views in regard girls' situation both in specific schools and in a wider social context. The main section explores what characterises being a girl in the school system and in society at large in the eyes of the female students.

5.2 Teachers' perspectives

To explore the dominating perspectives of the various schools and individual teachers in regard girls and their school situation, ten teachers and headmasters from seven schools were interviewed and asked to describe the practices, concepts and ideas they personally consider to be important in regard the various topics.

5.2.1 Male/female teacher ratio

In Uganda there are far more male teachers than female. The number of qualified female teachers in Uganda has remained persistently lower than that of their male counterparts. Women constitute 39.8 per cent of the primary school and 25 per cent of secondary school teachers (FOWODE 2012:8). The numbers are especially low in technical institutions and vocational schools. Also very few schools are headed by women and women are according to one informant (Ja, teacher) underrepresented in “*decision positions*”. Kwesiga (2005:242) found that male teachers dominate in science subjects, as heads of subject departments and in regard all other responsibilities. However, women may typically be heads of subject departments such as “home management” or “dressmaking”. This means that Ugandan girls go through especially secondary school (and higher education) seeing men in charge of the whole school system, both as teachers and administrators. This was a concern mentioned by all the teachers. According to one female teacher (Ng) this...*contributes to continuing reproduction of the stereotype that women do not belong in the same way as men in the education system.*

The influence of female teachers is seen as an important motivating factor for the girls by most of the informants. As role-models female teachers motivate girls to enrol and to increase their attendance and persistence rates (Kwesiga 2005:74) and female teachers in science and mathematics are seen as crucial to recruiting girls into these subjects:

...we have (a) female mathematics teachers. That is very good. She... we are very happy she is there... Because for girls, they normally...girls don't normally do well in that subject. But we have her. And the girls they are performing.

(Ge, teacher)

Here, Ge directly relates girls' performance in mathematics to the lack of female teacher saying that girls *normally* do not do well but that now (since the female teacher came) they are performing (doing ok). Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy theory described how someone generally will only attempt to do things they think they can accomplish and will not attempt to do something in which they believe they will fail. When the girls only meet male teachers in these subjects they may take that to mean that those subjects are not for females or that they are not supposed to do well in them. Ge further explains that it is important that the girls see women in these positions because it shows the girls that they also *can manage*, indicating her belief in this mechanism.

However, female teachers are not so well regarded or respected in the communities as are the male teachers and their potential as positive role-models is thereby weakened by the generally lower status of women in society. Adding to this that men dominate in most leadership positions and in science subjects the girls experience a lot of “negative” influences as they go through the system. By negative influences I refer both to the deprivation of role- models that the girls can identify with which may lead them (and their communities) to conclude that these particular areas are not for them and to the negative views of some of the female teachers which makes them less suitable as role models as the girls may not wish to be like them but rather the opposite.

Other informants underlined problems in relation to handling “*girl-matters*” like menstruation, and sexual harassment when talking about the lack of female teachers. In rural areas female teachers, as well as NGO-workers and government officials, emphasised that the absence of female teachers led to fewer girls attending school. Furthermore, they mentioned various explanations for the low number of female teachers, among the most critical were lack of appropriate accommodation (with no privacy or security), intimidation by male teachers or other co-staff and sexual harassment (from both co-staff and students). Inadequate maternity leave was also seen as a major challenge. Women are supposed to resume work almost immediately after giving birth (within a few weeks). Lack of gender sensitive sanitary facilities like latrines, and bathrooms were also repeatedly mentioned as one matter in urgent need of improvement to get girls (and female teachers) to attend school.

Research by the Foundation for African Women Educationalists (FAWE, 1999) suggests that girls are more likely to stay in school if the school deals with reproductive health issues and if girls are able to talk to a woman in authority. The presence of female teachers also protects the girls from undesirable actions from boys or male teachers.

Although many issues come into play here, the most important factors stressed by the female teachers were the need for safety and for appropriate role-models for the girls. They saw it as vital that the girls should understand they have a rightful place in the education system. However, they also worried about the environments at some schools saying that they were not yet safe, a point that was particularly stressed by the teachers in Northern Uganda. On the structural or systemic levels one sees that female teachers suffers many of the same challenges they describe as affecting to the female students; lack of proper facilities at schools and gendered hierarchies in the administrative and academic structures of the institutions which makes it difficult for them to fit in and claim educational authority. This suggests that

an increase in number of female teachers alone is not sufficient in terms of changing the negative ideas regarding girls' position within the education system but that a strengthening of female teachers' status in society is also essential.

5.2.2 Sexual harassment and violence

Violence against women in Uganda is rampant (Kwesiga 2005). Sometimes violence against women is also accepted by women. In a survey quoted in Kwesiga (2005:145) around 40 per cent of the women asked agreed that a husband is justified to beat his wife if she goes out without telling him, neglects children, refuses sexual relations or argues with him. Moreover, the police treat domestic violence as a personal domestic issue and do not get involved. This shows that women's position in Ugandan society is generally viewed, by both men and women, as subordinated to that of men and specifically to their husbands.

The headmaster of a girl's only boarding school in Gulu describes a situation where sexual violence is common and where the girls and female teachers are unable to walk alone even in daytime. She explains how they try to cope with the situation at schools and in the community:

Men have become so unruly in this community. We have counselling; we have class counselling and community counselling. We need the men to, or the boys, they need to feel responsible for including and treating their fellow...the girls right... [...] ...in the school... They are... it's not good for the girls to be alone outside of school grounds

(J, headmaster)

In discussions on sexual harassment and violence there was a generalizing tendency in the discourse to include all men. Men are seen as adhering to traditional gender roles and as taking advantage of their position higher up in the hierarchy. The overall representation of men seems to fortify stereotypes of masculinity and power and strengthens the position of hegemonic masculinity in general as men are seen to some extent as enslaved by cultural and biological factors, and unable or unwilling to change. Furthermore, the teachers talked about *sentezising* (G, M) boys and men to the problems and spoke of *counselling* and *community-talks* (J, H) as ways of dealing with the situation so there seem to be a general belief that if only the men or boys are taken into account and addressed directly and someone explains the situation for them they might change. The female teachers focus is on changing the men, not the girls.

Boys' hostility towards girls seem to be widespread in school and many of the teachers referred to "teasing", "bullying" and boys making sexual remarks and gestures towards the girls. One teacher described a situation where boys from the village or nearby schools would wait for the girls at the schools' water pump:

...But also, that is a problem. Because the community at large, they also must use the pump. It's community involvement...but the boys... for example they hide in the bush. They hide there, were the pump is. And they wait for the girl there. So the environment is not good for the girls. And the boys are there and say "I love you" "I love you" in the woods...

(M, teacher)

Furthermore, sexual harassment of female staff both by male colleagues and male students are fairly common.

One cultural manifestation of the lower status of women in Uganda is kneeling. Women are supposed to show men respect by kneeling in front of them. This practice is mentioned by one of the informants (Ng) as accentuating women's subordination to men and suggests that since girls and boys see this everywhere throughout their lives they tend to believe that women in fact are subordinated to the man. She offers this, among other things, as an explanation for why so many men and boys seem to think it is ok to harass girls and women. Furthermore, women and girls are not expected to look men directly in the eye and are expected to appear humble and respectful before their elders. Since girls are expected to be obedient and socialized to feel that boys and men are in some ways their superiors, many are vulnerable to physical and sexual harassment and abuse and they lack the confidence, skills and knowledge of how to deal with such situations.

5.2.3 Enrolment and persistence

Although the enrolment figures after the introduction of UPE and USE has noticeably increased for both boys and girls, girls are still more likely to drop out of school than boys. Most of the teachers interviewed were concerned with problems related to *bridging the gender gap*.

One teacher (Di) repeatedly stressed the fact that to get more girls to enrol at the institute one had to have more girls attending. Among interventions undertaken at the institute in this regard was the construction of a girls' hostel on campus (previously girls' had to stay off school grounds, finding accommodation in nearby hostels or with private persons) to ensure a safe environment for the girls and reduce sexual harassment and other issues related to living off campus. As the teacher explained...*parents are unlikely to send their girls to a school unless they feel safe that the girls are looked after... and in...good hands.*

In addition the institute established new courses that were seen to be attractive to girls like a Secretary course and one in Dressmaking. The institute hoped that by recruiting more girls overall to the institution the recruitment to the more traditionally male-dominated courses would also increase as the school environment would become more equalized, the girls would feel more at home and the parents would feel more comfortable in sending their girls to the institute.

Almost all the teachers I spoke with seemed genuinely interested in recruiting girls to subjects and areas which are not seen as "traditionally feminine". In the more academic schools the focus was mainly on encouraging more girls to do science subjects whereas at the vocational institute it was particularly the electrical and plumbing courses that were promoted. There were some concerns among some of the vocational teachers as to whether girls could actually do all the things that were expected of them (heavy lifting, long hours etc.) but the general opinion was that the girls were good students and often more focused and determined than the boys.

The higher drop-out rates for girls were usually attributed to traditional roles and values within the communities on what girls should do and aspire to, but some teachers also referred to hostile school environments, mentioning sexual harassment and other forms of bullying, as reasons for girls not continuing their education.

5.2.4 Facilities, atmosphere and quality of education

The quality of education has deteriorated over time due to the decline in the Ugandan economy and, particularly in the North, due to civil unrest. The situation is improving but lack of facilities, teaching resources and teachers are still prevalent at all levels of education.

The school facilities in especially the Northern area are a major problem both generally, and in terms of recruiting and keeping girls in school. Many schools lack buildings or have only

temporary structures, most of them do not have enough seats for the students and many lack separate sanitation facilities for girls.

...And also... the facilities, the schools, we have no seats. They sit on the floors and there is no room for the girls. They don't want to sit on floors with big boys that tease them.

(H, head teacher).

There is a focus on the girls feeling *uncomfortable* at school, and this is related to both the general atmosphere that is seen as more friendly to boys (because of a majority of male teachers, certain teaching methods or as in the quote above because the girls are teased by the boys and have to sit on the floor) but also because of the lack of structures like changing rooms or separate latrines. The latrines are usually without locks and even doors, and unless there are specific latrines designated for (particularly the adolescent) girls they will usually be too embarrassed or intimidated to use them. Furthermore, lack of sanitary pads and washing rooms affects girls during menstruation as they are unable to keep clean. At one school where the village had helped construct a changing and wash-room for the girls in addition to separate latrines the teachers (M and Ge) described an increase in girls attending school and fewer girls staying home due to *embarrassments*.

Furthermore, there has been a lack of trained teachers; in 1992 almost half of all primary teachers in Uganda were untrained. This situation has improved, but the rural areas still suffers from lack of trained personnel. One head teacher, whose school is involved in a special campaign to recruit girls back into the system after pregnancies and marriage, and which educate teachers for the region explains the situation in the district like this:

In this region literacy is 20% and the... it's especially bad for women. We teach in local languages in primary school to help them...Most of the women are illiterate here. Men...they have 65 %...and also... because of this some teachers they don't read either...The teachers... You know they are illiterate...And the challenge...You can imagine... They cannot teach the children to read when they don't read themselves. It's a problem we have here.

(H, head teacher)

Mothers' education levels have proven to be crucial when it comes to sending girls to school, educated women tend to educate their girls, and the high levels of illiteracy and lack of formal education among women in the Northern region influence their daughters negatively in terms of years of schooling.

The teachers mentioned several factors at play related to educational quality and difficulties related to teaching materials and general resources. However, most of these factors equally affect boys and I will not discuss them here. However, I will look closer at some issues in regard the lack of sanitation facilities for girls as these were mentioned several times and by every teacher interviewed.

The teachers focus and emphasis when discussing this matter were on the girls' embarrassment and feelings. This could be linked to Goffman and his theory of social roles. Although Goffman attributes a large amount of agency to individuals that enables them to take up social roles as they like, he describes these roles as vulnerable and argues that inconsistencies in a chosen role lead to feelings of incapability and embarrassment. Considering how the girls are operating in environments designed and organised to suit the needs of boys they may have to adopt roles that do not separate them too much from the boys. When attention is drawn to female specifics like menstruation or their developing bodies this might be perceived as a threat to their claim of being full and competent members of society (Buit, G. 2013). The girls are alienated from the boys who are perceived as the norm. Also the focus on menstruation and female issues and thereby their maturing bodies might lead to changed expectations from parents, teachers, peers and the communities.

5.2.5 Teaching methods

Male teachers tend to be impatient with girls, according to some of the informants, and do not seem to believe the girls are able to perform on the same level as boys. According to Kwesiga (2005:75) one of the persistent explanations of lower achievement by girls is lack of encouragement by teachers, especially in science subjects and mathematics. Other aspects concerning teaching methods mentioned by the informants were male teachers ignoring girls in class, only addressing boys, or teaching methods that were seen to alienating girls in other ways: *And also the methodology is very much... The teachers teach in a very tough way...it's not easy for a girl, for a big girl to be... to feel comfortable with these methods. The teachers are not... we must teach or mentor them to see to change that way of...* (H)

According to one teacher, male teachers tended not to be very observant when it came to the girls' needs in the classroom. She explained that boys often dominate the various teaching situations and that it is important for teachers to be aware of this and make countermeasures so that the girls are included also:

...you need to supervise or else the male student they take over and do everything and the female student is just sitting a side watching...And when you ask why they sit there, they say the boys will not let them do anything...So I supervise and sometimes tell them... you do that! ...and you do that! To make sure they all get a chance. I think the female teachers are better at...to see these things...

(Ng, teacher)

The informants emphasises the need for a more inclusive methodology. The girls seem to be largely ignored in classes by many teachers and the informants argues that it is important to encourage the girls into participation and to boost their confidence. Within science or technical subjects the girls are usually out-numbered by boys and because of this they tend to be overpowered by them also. The boys are often both *pushy* and assertive and the girls may find it hard to stand up to them, especially if they are very few in number, and so they miss out on important learning situations like practical assignments and so on (Ng).

This pushiness of the boys and reluctance on the girls' part might be another aspect of the socialization of girls into subversive role where they for instance are expected to appear humble and respectful before their elders or not to look men directly in the eye. This attitude and the parallel socialisation of boys into more assertive roles may make it difficult for girls to fully benefit from particularly the participatory methods of teaching because they tend to be reluctant to ask questions or to take fully part in discussions. Furthermore, when it comes to practical assignments (i.e. vocational training sessions, laboratory work) they may have trouble affirming their own space and actually getting to do anything. This again has a negative effect on the girls' performance in school which may support the stereotypical views of female students' inferior capabilities. As suggested by some of the teachers (H, Ng, M) it is hard for girls to contribute in oral discussions and to ask questions in class when they very often are being ridiculed by the boys or ignored by the teachers who will focus their attention on the boys. This is a form of negative learning where the girls constantly experience others' perception of them as less important and as likely to give wrong (or stupid) answers, something which again may influence their self-concept of ability and subsequently their

educational performance. Social learning theory stresses the importance of learning by observation (Bandura 1977) and focuses on the various behaviour patterns that develop in response to particular circumstances. Some types of behaviour are rewarded while others might produce unfavourable results. Various behaviour patterns are learned by watching the behaviour of others and observing what consequences various actions produces for them. The social learning theory suggests that people usually imitate behaviour that they observe in models that are similar to themselves. In the instances mentioned above, the girls repeatedly sees other girls either being ridiculed or ignored in class and thus they choose to adopt what they feel to be the safer (or smarter) behaviour of being quiet, and some choose to embrace the idea that they are not good at these things. Since this chosen behaviour as suggested by the teachers is what is socio-culturally expected of girls, it is rewarded in the form of acceptance by teachers and peers and is likely to be repeated. By acceptance I refer to for instance the girls being comforted by teachers if failing or performing badly and told that it is ok because they are not supposed to be doing these kinds of subjects anyways. Girls are thought of as lacking abilities in certain subjects because they are not *strong* or *because the other students (the boys) are too competitive so the girls will...have trouble*. (M). However, as described in Chapter 4.4 children and teenagers are not just passively letting gender and behavioural norms wash over them but actively engage in taking up or rejecting the models supplied by adults or peers. This is discussed in greater detail in later.

5.2.6 Moral and proper behaviour

At one vocational school there were some concerns among the staff as to what would happen with the school environment (or more specifically moral) when the girls moved in (the dorm was just about finished and some girls had already started to move in). This resulted in a meeting where it was decided to build a fence around the girls' compound and thereby making it more difficult for the male and female students to socialise. All mixed boarding schools in Uganda have very strict regulations on interaction between boys and girls. Also there seem to be an emphasis on girls' moral. Girls are generally expelled from school if they become pregnant or are caught with a boy. The boys are rarely expelled for similar breaches; even in the cases where boys admitted to being the father of the child they were usually only expelled for two weeks. When asked about the reasons for this discrepancy in punishment the teachers usually said that the pregnant girls are seen as immoral and as bad role models for the other girls at the schools and that therefore it is not advisable to have them there. Also, they

explained that most of the time the girls' boyfriends are not school boys but rather older males with jobs in the area.

The girls they are the problem. They want to be with the boys instead of being in school. And they are not disciplined [...] Last year we had a girl that was pregnant... they do these things... That's why they drop out...

(F, teacher)

The girls are seen as problems and as lacking discipline and there seem to be an attitude among both staff and students that girls should behave differently from boys. Girls were supposed to act "feminine" meaning for instance, according to one informant, that they were not supposed to run but to move gracefully and that they should be quiet and respectful (Ng, teacher). The idea that there are certain fundamental differences between men and women both in terms of physical differences and in regard their proper place in society seemed prevalent among the staff. Some teachers talked about how they tried to argue against these kinds of attitudes saying that many would listen if you took time to explain, but that it was hard to change ideas that were taken to be right or true.

Some people at school...some teachers they say for example they say that prefects need to be male students...Or maybe they would say that the dining prefect needs to be energetic... you know...and that means a boy...girls are feminine...they are not energetic...it means boys...so what I do...I try to argue...

(Ng, teacher)

In Ngs opinion it is important to recruit more female teachers because they might see things differently and help contest the dominant idea of the girls as being weaker or less gifted than the boys. According to Bourdieu (1990) the gendered practices of everyday life reproduce a society's view of how women and men should act. This mechanism is manifested in the description by one other teacher (M) of how at her school the girls act in the ways "expected of them" to achieve what they want because they get more positive reactions from the teachers if they do. If they behave differently they are quickly described as "unruly" or "difficult" even "wild" by the teachers and because of the teachers' attitudes they will also be perceived by the other students, male and female, as "different". She goes on to say that

...if there are no... teachers there to contest these ideas, the system...the school system...will...it will never change...this is the challenge we face...for the girls and...the women...

(M, teacher)

5.2.7 Culture

Ugandan women carry a heavy work load in the home and in the fields. Kwesiga (2002:105) quotes the poet Okot p'Bitek, who described the African woman as *sweeper, cook, ayah, dishwasher, cultivator, store-keeper, builder, runner of errands, cart, lorry and donkey*. Women's low participation in higher education is associated with norms and values embraced by men and women, expressed in the form of stereotypes manifested in the socialisation process and reinforced by social practice. These stereotypes hold that women's place is in the private sphere where she has to fulfil her roles as mother and house wife. Men on the other hand are encouraged by society to work and act outside of the home in the public sphere. Girls are socialized as apprentices of their mothers to play similar roles when they grow up. Their tasks in the home included sweeping, cooking, looking after siblings, fetching water and assisting in economic activities such as farming. When driving through the country side one of my informants (KE, teacher) pointed out that most of the children playing on the streets and in yards were boys, *the girls are at home... working* she explained. This highlights the fact that while boys are allowed to remain children for a long time girls become little women, helping their mothers with their work and spending time in the company of their mothers and other female role models. The girls therefore begin to perceive and inscribe the culture of subservience and domesticity from a very early age, while the boys learn independence and self-confidence and are encouraged to be active and to play with other boys. It has been suggested that boarding schools are particularly beneficial for girls since it gets them out of the home and the chores expected of them there and they are treated as individuals rather than trained for the community (Kwesiga 2002:230).

Many girls are not allowed to or discouraged from attending school or college by parents, husbands, fiancées or peers. *There are many challenges for them (the girls)...The attitude among the community is that once the girls are mature they should be married off. Sold off...That is a common attitude here. (H, Teacher).*

There is according to some informants an attitude in the communities that an educated girl is less valuable as a wife since she is likely to have fewer children. Furthermore, education, especially girls' education, is seen by some communities as a plot by the Western world to erase Africans through reducing birth rates. This has been commented on by Christine Heward (1997) who in her analysis of the West's and UN's focus on education in the developing world, shows that in many cases the main arguments (in the West) for supporting educational schemes is girls' education's correlation with reduced birth rates. She argues that education should be advocated as a human right not as a "form of contraceptive" because the latter alienates stakeholders that have different views in regard procreation than the West. According to some informants (M and Ge) the girls are described as to *change* and become *different* if they attend school and many village elders and parents are reluctant to educate the girls since it may lead to them not appreciating traditional values.

We talk to the communities...to the old... the old men (laughs). Sometimes they are so stubborn [...]you know the girls, at home they fetch water. They fetch for the family. And when they come to school they cannot fetch. And sometimes the parents say they, the girl she must stay at home...But we have the pump and the girls can fetch water and bring back home[...]but then...they are not happy even then...it's...they do not like us changing their girls...

(Ge, Teacher)

From this quote we may infer that even though the teachers label the men's unwillingness to let their daughters attend school as stubbornness and further link it, through the use of "old men", to traditional values, they seem to agree that schooling will in fact change the girls. In the same way, another teacher (M) refers to the school's responsibility for educating girls saying it is important to *change the girls' attitudes so that they may live different lives*, indicating that the men's or parents' understanding of consequences of educating their daughters are true in some respects.

Presenting issues as if they are natural and without alternative is one feature of hegemonic discourses that helps maintaining certain ideals' superior position. When explaining men's negative feelings towards educating their daughters, many of the arguments used were referring to the inferior power status of women due to societal and cultural norms. *They (the men) worry...that the girls will not obey their husband [...] kneel and...and be respectful...you know... (M, Teacher)*. Several of the other arguments also seemed to rely on

these discursive practices, like the worry that the educated girls would not produce enough children or would not become very good house wives. The teachers usually referred to men in the plural, rarely to specific groups of men although sometimes statements would be qualified like in the quote above, as to be about “older” or “village” –men. This generalised wording implies a belief among the women in a common tendency by men to act in ways that are negatively affecting the girls. Also, seeing as women or mothers is rarely mentioned in relation to these issues this might suggest they are seen as not having the decision making power within the families or communities to have any significance in regard these matters. However, as already mentioned in previous chapters this is not necessarily true as mothers’ education level have significant impact on their daughters schooling opportunities.

Socio-economic changes have made education necessary, not just for the purposes of providing income earning opportunities, but also for the potential to contribute to the improvement in the standards of living of individuals, families and communities. This again has led to an expansion of the roles that women play, out of necessity but also choice. However, the perception of women and their accepted roles and perceived capabilities have remained the same, that is traditional, and therefore many people still have difficulty accepting that there is a need to equip women with the skills and knowledge, through education, that enable them to take up their new roles and function effectively in the modern world. The two worlds (new and old) are dichotomised and cultural differences are converted into value differences that might be making it harder for the communities to accept the new ways as that will mean accepting the inferiority of their tradition or culture.

It is not only parents’ or the older village men’s’ opinions that affects the girls behaviour through this form of negative valuation of education. Rather, teachers in rural areas also mentioned *bad peer behaviour* as one factor discouraging girls from attending school. *The girls are harassed by the boys or by other girls who [...] would already be married, and they will be told they should not come to school but rather live normally.* (H, Teacher). Both groups’ arguments heavily rely on presenting things as if they are natural and their arguments includes slightly deterministic insinuations; the girls’ ought to stop the non-sense and live *normally*, the way they are supposed to, and it is suggested that the girls will inevitably end up living a *normal* life and that they might as well start doing so as soon as possible. Furthermore, their argumentation holds that the girls’ will be better equipped for this job without formal education (at least there seem to be little need for secondary or higher education within this understanding of women’s roles in society).

In the urban areas negative peer pressure did not seem to be such a big problem, it was mentioned by one teacher only (S) in relation to teenage mothers and their reintroduction to the education system. Negative peer pressure was also affecting boys, but the general idea seemed to be that the girls were more likely to experience this kind of pressure. Also negative attitudes regarding educating girls were not as prevalent in the Central region. One teacher (Ng) mentioned that parents may choose to leave one girl at home if they have financial trouble so that she can contribute in the house and also save them some money, but she also said that in most cases the girl would be sent back to school as soon as the parents found the money. Generally, education in the city, of both boys and girls, seems to be the norm and most parents will make an effort to educate all their children at least through primary school and usually through secondary also.

5.2.8 Summary

In this section I have presented a picture of the settings or contexts in which the teachers and girls find themselves. Through quoting the teachers in the two main regions I studied, I have presented the reader with ideas and trends regarding girls' opportunities and positions within the school system in particular, but also within their respective communities. My aim has been to create an understanding that goes beyond the facts and figures presented in Chapter 2, an understanding intended to bring the reader closer to the actual situations at hand before hearing from the girls. Furthermore, the various statements by these teachers underline how institutions like schools, parents and peers in different ways guide the girls into gendered work and family roles. As the girls grow up, they take on particular gendered social statuses within the stratification systems of their communities. This tendency is more visible in the Northern region than in the cities but ideas regarding girls' position in society and their main responsibilities, seen predominantly to be related to the roles of wives and mothers, were very much the same in both regions indicating the consistent ascription of lower status to women in Ugandan society. Gender specific role training and learning takes place by interacting with the world both within and outside of the family and schools are important arenas for this socialisation process something both parents and teachers are aware of and which sometimes cause conflicts between the two. There is a tendency among the informants of representing men as stubborn or as having a certain mind-set that causes problems for girls and for their access to education. Several of the teachers mentioned problems related to the influence of old men, village men, communities or husbands or men and boys in general. However, they all emphasised the need to increase men's appreciation of the girls' roles in the communities and

focused on solving the problems through increasing male participation in these issues through talks, counselling, community meetings and discussion and so on. In this way the men are seen as an instrument for women's empowerment and not kept on the "outside". This is important since the generalized discourse, where values predominantly are assigned to gender through making comparisons and constructing contrasts between the sexes, divides people into "us" and "them" and is not likely to bring about change. Rather, a focus on the interrelation aspect between men and women might help toward a more equal distribution of value.

The teachers also highlighted teaching methodologies and school-environments that are seen as *unfriendly* to the girls as areas of concern, alienating girls from school, as well as lack of positive female role models that could encourage the girls and make them expand their views on what is considered to be appropriate female roles. The teachers put almost equal emphasis on structural obstacles and cultural and behavioural hindrances although the two are closely linked. The teachers were actively involved in promoting and protecting the girls and highlighted the need to increase awareness of girls' abilities and needs. However, in some areas there seemed to be rather substantial difficulties and challenges related to the sensitising of both the patriarchal communities and within the local schools.

5.3 Girls' perspectives

As described in Chapter 3 and the previous sub-chapter, the schools where I conducted my research were (although mostly urban) quite different both in terms of organisation, students (background, academic qualifications etc.), and facilities (resources, teachers, housing etc.). The school "cultures" were also different, mostly perhaps due to the fact that some were boarding schools, and others day schools or both boarding -and day schools depending on course taken. Of the main three schools involved in the study, one is purely vocational whereas the other two have a comprehensive curriculum but with an emphasis on academic subjects. The girls interviewed therefore represent quite different backgrounds and school environments nevertheless throughout the following text they talk about similar experiences and mutual feelings regarding many of the issues at hand. The first sub-chapter gives a brief description of the informants' families and socio-economic backgrounds.

5.3.1 Family and background

Ma is 17 year old when this study starts. Her parents live and work in Europe and she is staying at a boarding school. During holidays she stays with her aunt in Kampala. She wants to become a doctor and takes her studies very seriously. She has three sisters and her parents pay much attention to the children's education.

Pe is also 17 year old. She wants to study aerospace engineering or mechanical engineering. Her father is dead and she lives (when not at school) with her mother, siblings and nephew and niece. She has one older brother studying in Europe and her family is generally very supportive of her studies and her choices. She stresses, as do the other girls at her school, the privilege and benefits from studying at a prestigious school underlining not only the schools' academic performance record but also its door-opening-abilities.

La (17) comes from a middle class family. She wants to study law. She is particularly interested in children and women's issues and specifically wants to work within these fields when she finishes university. She loves music, sings and plays the guitar and she is engaged in a lot of extracurricular activities.

Es (16) is from a Kampala middle class family. Her father works in insurance and Es sees it as her "duty" to follow in her father's footsteps. She underlines that she is not forced into this choice but seeing that none of her siblings have taken up that path it is only reasonable that she, the youngest, will do so. She is concerned with women's rights and is very upset with the government which she feels is not doing enough in regard to this matter and which to a certain extent is making things worse. She is the most (vocally) political active of the girls and seems frustrated by the situation she feels the country is in.

Wi (16) studies carpentry at a vocational school, she comes from a rural area outside of Kampala. Her mother is a peasant farmer and came to Uganda as a refugee from Rwanda in 1994. W's father died in Rwanda.

LE (23) studies at university and is finishing off her bachelor degree. She has fought hard for her education, supported herself by working for fees through parts of primary and secondary school and describes herself as *a bit of a women's activist*.

The other informants, seven girls from various rural areas in the Northern and Central districts, will be introduced briefly when they are quoted.

Many of the girls' mothers were only educated up to primary or secondary school level. Some had received very little formal education. Most fathers had received both primary and secondary and some even higher education. The parents' generally seemed concerned with their children's education, and particularly the mothers appeared to be very much involved in getting the girls through school. One informant (J, 21), now at university, describes her mother's attitude like this: *My mother doesn't have a good education. She stopped I think at SI. But because of this.... she has ensured that we, all the children, have that education. And she keeps on advising us. I...she wants us to...get that independence...* Although most of the fathers, if still alive, contribute financially to keeping the children in school, the fathers in the rural areas seem to play a less clear role in education matters compared to the fathers in town. In most cases the mothers seems to be the person most insistent on the girls getting an education, usually referring to their own lack of education and subsequent lack of opportunities as being the reason for wanting their daughters to go to school. Interestingly, the girls emphasised their fathers' approval of their achievements even in those cases where the father had done little to support the girls' education: *My father is very proud, not many in my family have...this education... And I managed on my own...he could not help...he did not help...or work at that time... (LE, 23)*

A few of the informants came from backgrounds where they were forbidden to go to school by their fathers, usually because their mothers were dead and the father had a new wife and new children and the stepmother wanted the girl at home to help with the children.

Sometimes, my father did not want to hear the name of my mother. And I, he did not want me to go to school. I had to stay at home to work there, to help...her [...].

(Po, 15)

Most of the informants however, came from supportive households as mentioned earlier, and although the money for fees was sometimes difficult to find the girls were encouraged to go back to school as soon as money was found. The parents also generally chose school for all their children, boys and girls, rather than keeping some at home to work.

There are many family related issues which determine women's access to education. In some cases parental attitudes towards their children limit girls' opportunities to advance through the system. These attitudes may be related to traditional values and practices and Kwesiga (2005:167-170) showed that parents in certain areas saw education as potentially leading to

their daughters ignoring culture, mainly in relation to respecting their husbands and in-laws. These attitudes were also described in Chapter 5.2.7 and offered by the teachers as specific challenges for girls. Other aspects of the family background that influences girls' access to education is the socio-economic status of the family. For reasons already described in Chapter 2, poor parents are more likely to educate a boy than a girl if they cannot afford to educate both. In addition to this the families' education level influences girls' access to education as educated parents usually educate their children. On the other hand, as seen in the cases of many of the informants, lack of education or low levels of education may also inspire the parent or parents to educate their children. Although, looking again at the informants' stories this seem to generally be truer in cases of mothers rather than fathers. Examples of both these mechanisms are found in the girls descriptions of themselves and their families: Jn (16) for instance points out her (teacher) fathers' stress on the importance of education. *My mum stopped after S6 – she did not go further, to university or anything. But, my dad, he, my dad was a teacher. He died in an accident, but he was, he was very concerned with us, with the children getting a good education [] he would not accept any...anything else.* J (21) on the other hand comes from a family where the mother has been working hard to finance the children's education although she does not have much education herself:

My mother...I don't know. She stopped when she married...maybe P7?[] ...my mother is a peasant farmer... We, everyone there... have to work and help ourselves and...because she...school is important...and she helps us...we work [...] and somehow we manage. It's hard, but my mother, my mother... cares for me, I am happy.

Children do not only learn at school. Behaviours they observe within their homes and in their communities are also important influences in their social competence development (Bandura 1977). What the girls see and so at home influences their perceptions of women's roles in society and their ideas about education. Decisions to enrol a child and to keep her in school are made by parents and their perceptions of the cost and benefits of education are very important, however parental aspirations and inclinations in regard education is also very important. Some parents prefer their children to be educated as an end in itself, regardless of financial benefits (or cost) whereas other sees it as an investment as it will bring with it future financial returns when the child gets a job for instance (Kwesiga 2002:52-53). The latter view favours boys since the girls are expected to marry and her potential future earnings will to a larger degree benefit her husband. Kwesiga shows evidence that a mother's lack of education

has an adverse effect on girls' access to schooling. However, as seen from the informants' accounts this is not always the case as some mothers with lower levels of education insist on educating their daughters to ensure they have more options than what they had themselves. Kwesiga also found that the mother's positive attitude to children's schooling influenced a child's persistence in school and provided important support and this is also evident from the informants' stories. Their fathers, in most cases but not all, seem to play a smaller role in this process and they are mostly mentioned in relation to finances. Sometimes they will refuse to pay but then the mothers and girls find other solutions often helped by the school or teachers. It seems more likely that a girl will be taken out of school if the mother or both parents are negative to education than if only the father is.

5.3.2 Financial challenges

Educating a child in Uganda is very expensive when compared to average family income and parents have to make difficult decisions as to how meagre resources can be allocated. As mentioned earlier, parents tend to favour educating boys before girls if they cannot afford to educate all their children. However, that the family cannot afford to pay school fees does not necessarily stop the girls from attending school. The majority of the informants had experienced severe financial challenges and had met and dealt with these challenges in various ways. LE (23) who comes from a rather poor household fought hard and worked hard to get herself through the education system:

For me P1 to P4 were ok, but P5-P7 became very difficult. There were no school fees at home, and at school they said for me to stop studying... That I could not come to school because the fees were not there. But I fought for my future, I went and talked to the headmistress, and she said ok... and let me become a school dependent. So from then I spent all the time, also holidays, working at school for school fees. I was staying at school for 6 years, all the time working for the tuition. I did everything, worked in the garden, with the animals, in the kitchen and so on. I used to fetch water for the cows and it was very heavy work. And also I had to study. I was up very very early in the morning and I worked in the evenings also.

Sometimes the schools take in school dependents, often these are gifted children from poor families whose parents cannot afford to pay for their education. The schools (or sometimes teachers) let the child work at school as fee payment. The work is usually quite hard and as LE mentions above it is sometimes difficult for them to find time to study. Another common

way of financing school is to take a “dead year”, meaning that the student drop out of school for a year or so to work and save up money for fees. When they have enough they return to school. After finishing her secondary education LE got a partial scholarship to university and she went there to study social science. After her second year, she asked for a dead year because of financial problems. She emphasises the importance of education, and that there are ways to deal with financial challenges:

I want to say to girls, to other girls, some they give up when it's difficult. Me, I could not give up, I wanted to make it. And I did. I think my advice is to stay and fight. To do the work and not stop trying...If parents don't have money my appeal is they can fight to their nails to stand on their own.

(LE, 23)

She stresses the fact that this is the fight of the individual. If the parents cannot help the girls have to stand up for themselves. To LE getting an education is the most important thing you can do for yourself, and she stresses this frequently saying several times that *you have to fight for your future*.

The other girls also told stories of financial difficulties and C (21) tells about the added barrier of having brothers or fathers who did not see the need for educating girls. However, she did not give up and managed to get through with it.

My biggest problem throughout my studies... I think my big problems were tuition, because I paid by myself. My parents... my father he paid some, but he was not always working so I worked hard. And took a dead year... some years to work and by the time I got back I was able to pay my tuition. So I did, I did all these things to pay for my education. My brothers, I have two of them, they said girls should not... they say why don't you just get married. So that was a challenge. But I did it myself.

(C, 21)

The girls linked education to having a *future* or being able *to live a life*. It was important for them to emphasise this link, and C said that without an education you would end up with no opportunities and would just be *someone who knows nothing*. To the informants education is a way to ensure independence for themselves, financially because they might get better jobs, but also personally as it removes them from traditional expectations.

After one semester I had to have a dead year – two years, and started up. My mum was single mother; my dad never paid anything although he existed. And my mum is still helping me with my fees. But we work together to get me more [...] I have to study so I can live a life [...] to be independent...and do my own...business...

(J, 16)

5.3.3 Going to school; rules and regulations

The girls of course have many stories related to their lives at school. As most of the informants attend boarding schools substantial parts of their lives are lived within the confinement of the school grounds. In this sub-chapter I include some reflections and narratives describing what life in school is like for the girls. Through their discussions the girls talk about almost everything, commenting on school regulations, their dreams and hopes for the future, the wish to do something for their country and frustration over the lack of opportunities/choices in some areas. The talks were rarely limited to gender issues alone, but very often that is where the conversations would end up. One common topic of conversation were school regulations, frustrations over the ban on hair extensions, they all have to have short cropped hair, and the rule banning girls and boys from speaking to each other at certain times were particularly debated.

There are these rules at the school, I'll read them to you: 'Dark cornering' is one, it is not allowed for... 'Opposite sex cannot fraternise after 7 pm'. Apart from in classes...And you can't leave campus. [...] And listen to this [...] a boy and girl should not be in body contact of any nature. A boy and girl shall not be together for more than 30 minutes at the school compound. Dark cornering can lead to suspension...' We can get expelled for talking to boys after 7 pm (laughs)... That's a bit daft... At least if it's outside and not... if its ordinary talking... We cannot walk next to boys rooms... or...walk in the dark...There is a path...for girls.

(La, 17)

As seen from this quote the schools enforce strict regulations on the interaction between boys and girls. This was seen by the girls as being both *silly* and *safer* depending on the situations in which we were discussing these issues. There was a general understanding among the girls

that some boys could be unsafe if encountered alone and if *circumstances are there* (La, 17). This comment was offered as part of their reasoning around the school regulations and might reflect their understanding of why the rules are in place rather than personal experiences. The girls did not indicate any form of sexual harassment by their class- and school mates in these conversations and most of the time described the rules as silly. Although the schools enforce strict limitations on the interaction between boys and girls they still spend a lot of time together, classes are mixed and so are meals and day-time activities. Sports tend to be separate and after the official activities of the day the students are to stay within their own compounds. Though the girls disliked some aspects of the rules, they did not want to allow boys into the girls' compound and explained this by saying it would be *stressful* (Es, 16) and emphasised *that [...] this is our space...we are...here we relax* (Pe, 17). Es (16) also said that this rules were ok because boys sometimes *can take advantage of girls*.

5.3.4 Single-sex schools, mixed schools and teaching methodology

Some of the girls came from single-sex schools before joining a mixed school, and they generally seemed to think it was better to be in a mixed school because they got “*used to being around boys*” and that it was strange to let the two sexes be educated separately when they eventually would have to work side by side. However, some meant that they performed better at the single-sex school as there were fewer things to disrupt them there. They were annoyed with some of the boys in their class for always answering questions, even when the teacher had specifically asked a girl some boy would just answer anyway (Es (16), Pe (18)). Ma and La both went to single-sex schools before attending a mixed boarding school and they generally regarded the mixed school as being the better option, although they had certain suggestions to the teachers and administration in regard creating a better educational environment for girls. Ma (17) put it this way:

(In this mixed school)...*The boys outnumber the girls and then... they diminish the girls... I believe girls are very important and have a lot to offer and I don't like this dominance...of boys. [...]My other school was a girls' school. And there...they tell you that you can achieve things... They, the teachers, gave us moral boosting...focusing on us and saying that we can do it...But here[...] But the teachers could...they should talk to the students about these issues...They should tell us what we can do. Some teachers and boys they say you are...that the girls are only growing up to be house wives...But*

the mixed school...at least...gives you exposure... I mean you are not going to be living in a single sex country...

An analysis of the top-ranking schools in Uganda shows that single-sex schools do relatively better in national exams than do mixed schools and this is usually explained by their positive gender stereotyping, number of positive role models and more encouraging environments. Mixed schools on the other hand make the girls more vulnerable to judgements from others about their supposed incompetence in certain stereotyped subjects like maths and sciences and directly affect their confidence. Bandura's (1997) argues that someone's level of motivation, emotional states, and actions are based on what they believe to be true rather than on what is objectively true. Subsequently, how people behave may be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing. This might be one reason why fewer girls choose to study science subjects in mixed schools. The pressure of concealed and obvious judgements by others, and having to compete with boys for attention, makes the girls feel less competent and therefore they opt for other subjects. By increasing girls' achievements and eliminating stereotypes, single-sex schools improve girls' performance on exams and help motivating them for these subjects. However, girls in single-sex schools also tend to choose traditional "girls' subjects" and some of the schools offers stereotyped curriculums offering only subjects deemed "suitable for girls" (Kwesiga 2002:77). Ma (17) points this out saying she felt the single-sex school put too much emphasis on stereotyped ideas about women and said about the girls' school that [...] *I think they were training us-to be house wives or mothers...I don't know. We had to do a lot of cleaning and cooking and so on...But at the other school. The co-ed one... The employees...the cleaners would do everything...for us...boys or girls...* She prefers the mixed school because it does not so openly train them into traditional female roles and because the boys and girls are treated alike when it comes to chores.

As a measure against discrimination and harassments some of the mixed schools have stated that they want to enrol more girls to achieve gender balance and to avoid harassment by boys.

5.3.5 Gender and untraditional career paths

At a technical institute, the general points of views when it came to being a girl at school reflected the fact that the school is vocational and mainly covers courses and career paths that

are male-dominated and seen as *un-girly*. As mentioned earlier, in Chapter 5.2.3, the schools and teachers has undertaken a broad variety of interventions to address gender issues and to attract more girls to the school.

Wi, is a 17 year old girl studying carpentry and joinery at a vocational school. She talks about being a girl within an educational and occupational space that is traditionally male-dominated and how she experiences the everyday life of being at school and studying carpentry. She is the only girl in her class. Her career decision mainly stem from the fact that she wants to be independent and able to work and make money for herself and her family. Her father is dead and she lives with her mother and two younger sisters in a village outside Kampala when she is not at school.

She does not want to stay in the village. She wants to move to town because she believes there are more opportunities there and alternatives to getting married. If she stays in the village she will live a traditional life and she does not want that. She enjoys her studies and does not feel excluded or harassed for being alone as a girl. She stresses the fact that there are other girls in other courses and that she is only alone in the particular course not in school in general.

I'm only girl in class. But I'm comfortable [...] because I take those boys as my brothers (laughs) They don't disturb me, they love me because I'm only girl. [...] I have to study... yeah after finishing I'll be able. After finishing and I get a job... This course is good. You can get a lot of money (laughs)...if you're hard working.

(Wi, 16)

She sees that the general perception of the vocational courses like Carpentry, Bricklaying, Plumbing or Electrical is that they *are for boys*, but she also sees that when working outside of school (through the institute's hands on project) the girls often get hired on by companies because they are dependable and conscientious workers. She also refers to female teachers and other girls within the same or similar fields as role models that keep her going when things are problematic: *It's difficult. But for me: I'm used to consult old ones and because you have someone like teachers, women [...] others... who have already finished such course and (realise) the moment when you are patient you can get everything you want...*

Pe studies at a predominantly academic school and she is majoring in science studies. She is well aware of the general attitude that these are not typical *girl areas* of study; however, she

does not see this as a problem. She underlines the value of a technical or scientific education when it comes to getting a job later, as she knows that unemployment levels for young people are particularly high in Uganda. She explains that in her physics class there are thirty-eight students and only seven girls. In biology the numbers are twenty-seven and six and this she emphasises is only an example of how few girls there are in the science and technical subjects. Of the six girls in the biology class, Pe and her friends are three. She finds it amusing that three friends, they have known each other from before school, represents fifty per cent of the girls in the class. She argues that the education system is biased and that there is a mentality among people when growing up that girls are not good at *science stuff*.

...it starts from primary school actually. There is just this mentality among the girls that boys are better to do science subjects. And they...they just don't try you know... And when they fail or get lower marks...They just...say...that in any case they're not supposed to be doing well. They're girls so it's normal...So because of that they don't really try...they're like...[...] ...and growing up with that mind-set...it affects girls' performance you know...in those subjects...Me...I was just always good at math, and physics and stuff like that so I didn't have to deal with the problem of not...of not being good enough. I was already good at it. And if teachers... I just did it anyway...I want to do engineering.

(Pe, 18)

As mentioned in Chapter 5.3.3 there is a general idea that girls are less able to do science subjects than boys. Ma (17) was worried about the situation at her school saying that: *Some of the girls here. They actual believe that girls can never be as good as the boys... They believe it. That it's natural.* Ma wants to become a doctor, like her parents, and therefore she needs science and maths classes. Girls are underrepresented in those classes and Ma is concerned and also a bit annoyed that teachers do not focus on this or encourage the girls to do such subjects. She is also annoyed by some of the other girls' attitudes, but it is the teachers and the administration she refers to as being in a position to change this and seeing that no-one makes an effort makes her feel frustrated. When it comes to girls' attitudes they mention that as it is regarded as less feminine to study these subjects some girls will rather choose *the other subjects...like art...so as to not be associated with* what may be described as masculine traits. Bourdieu ([1998] 200:167) argues that women often are placed in a 'double bind': if they behave like men, they risk losing the obligatory attributes of 'femininity'; if they behave like women; they appear incapable and unfit for the job. Judith Butler argues that doing gender is

not just about acting in a particular way. It is about embodying and believing certain gender norms and engaging in practices that map on to those norms, like in the instances described here where girls choose to adhere to what is traditionally accepted as feminine traits and instead of challenging these norms rather opt for studying subjects that will not put them in positions of having to deal with them.

5.3.6 Going to school; retention

As described in Chapter 5.3.2 the girls' efforts to stay in school were regularly interrupted by financial trouble. However, this is not the only issue keeping girls from attending and finishing school. Kwesiga 2002) shows how the numbers of girls in relation to boys progressively worsen the higher up in the education system one goes. Also there are differences in retention that are related to types of schools and geographical areas. For instance, government schools are less likely to retain pupils as compared to private schools and rural schools are less likely to retain pupils as compared to the urban and sub-urban schools. This probably reflects both the financial situation of many of the governmental schools and the rural people as well as the more traditional attitudes towards girls' education in many of the rural areas. The informants mentioned both structural barriers like parents' economy and schools' facilities as reasons for girls' drop-out but they emphasised personal traits:

It depends on who is ambitious and who is not. Some people, sometimes because of peer influence... these kids stop going, they drop out...Being in school is about, I think, which school you are in. If you are in a boarding school you are told how to stay in school. Other schools you... it's easier to not come. And it's up to the parents. If they support you, if not...you maybe drop out.

(J, 16)

J mentions multiple factors playing in on the decision to stay in school, but she continues to highlight *ambition* and *persistence* as major characteristics for choosing to stay in school. To her, and LE, it is about *not giving up* and *fighting for your future*. To them it is more about personal choice than societal barriers. The barriers are there but there is nothing you can do about it except choosing to fight for your future and your life.

Some of the other girls refer to having to help their families by working at home or of getting married as reasons for dropping out of school. These explanations are more common among the Northern girls although they too indicate the importance of personal traits when it comes to staying in school:*I think for us girls it's important to have...confidence...and re...resilience... To stay in school and to get a job...That is important. Pregnancy...and being...to be with the boys...it's not so good.*

(S,14)

The informants are far more concerned with personal and behavioural determinants than environmental ones when they describe reasons for staying or dropping out of school. Although they mention social norms and values, the influences from parents, teachers, and peers and the school environment, the points they stress are individual attitudes and abilities and more importantly the girls' actual actions, for example the girls' choice of education over marriage, and their personal responses to financial challenges. They suggest that staying in school sometimes is harder for a girl because she must deal with several challenges at once, specifically the extra burden of negative attitudes from parents, siblings or the community at large, whereas the boys usually are left with facing only one challenge, *finding money* (J, 16 and R, 23). Because of this it is important for the girls to be *strong* and not *giving up*. Again the informants focus on personal traits and the individual girls' responsibilities in looking after themselves when faced with external challenges.

5.3.7 Perceptions on girls' position in society at large

Kwesiga (2002) showed how the belief that basic education is adequate for women prevail in Ugandan society. She argued that women are not expected to acquire higher education because their basic role is reproduction. These attitudes were largely confirmed by the informants when discussing how girls are seen in their communities. Although some of the informants described or perceived gender and gender differences merely in terms of physical differences between men and women (in statements describing women as being weaker, more fragile etc. than men), most of the girls related the concept to ideas of differences regarding power, opportunities, family relations, culture, and the different roles men and women hold in society. Jen (16) describes how in ...*some part of Ugandan culture girls are seen as they*

should not go to school. And some parents think that is how it's supposed to be, and Ch (21) states that some people think girls are only there for marriage.

The discussions often centred around on the one hand, the situation as they perceived it for the girls in the rural areas which were seen as less good than in town, and on the other hand their ideas about career opportunities and how women's responsibility for children made them less suited for "top-end jobs". All the girls agreed on the situation for girls being worse in rural areas and that this was wrong and needed to change, however opinions varied when it came to women's duties after they've had children. Some, like Ch (21), wanted to see more women in higher positions and believed the reasons for fewer women in these kinds of positions were "*discrimination, mostly*". Whereas Jen (16) thought it was more to do with choice and believed that women have "*stronger responsibilities for children than men*" and felt they should stay at home "*at least when the baby... when the children are so small*".

Okeke-Ihejirika (in Abid and Cleghorn (eds) 2005:166) describes how limitations within the social system shape women's potential prospects in tertiary education even before they graduate from secondary school. And she says that these limitations strongly control women's access to tertiary education and reinforce their segregation from men at that level. She argues that often the pressure to reconcile career aspirations with social expectations regarding women's legitimate roles constrain both employment opportunities and prospects for professional advancement in paid work. Jen's idea concerning women's responsibilities when it comes to their children fits into this analysis. Jen is reluctant to wholeheartedly agree with the others that women can work as much as or at the same levels as men. She sees women's responsibility within the home and the family as fundamentally important.

Lobi Moshi (1998, in Abid and Cleghorn (eds). 2005), explains the problem like this:

There is the assumption that formal education is the ultimate liberator of women in Africa. However, we need to bear in mind that much of what is taught in formal education is like a double-edged-sword—for the most part it is foreign and sometimes has affected societal values for the worse. Although formal education can be used to raise women from the shackles of poverty and inequality, it can also make the same women victims of continuous criticism for abandoning cultural and traditional values. (p. 169)

This is not an exclusively Ugandan or African problem; women all over the world confront the dilemma of fitting educational and career ambitions into social roles. However, the

African context presents some unique challenges because of the paradoxes in the relations of gender introduced by colonization and capitalist expansion. The problem for the African women who aspires to acquire education credentials, according to Moshi and Okeke-Ihejirika, lies in their inabilities to skilfully manage these contradictions.

When asked to clarify the situation in terms of job opportunities and career paths available to women, the girls agreed that women could (or should) be offered the same opportunities as men. Ch (21) says that [...] *I think... male or female if you have a quality education you can get the job. If the job is there, you can get it. Even as a girl.* Jen (16) agrees with Ch saying that [...] *if you have a talent and you work for it...women...there are women in...politics...and everywhere. But you have to...be hard working.* However, Jen adds a comment to her statement saying that [...] *but it is not very easy for a woman...really... with the little ones... women have...it is difficult to have an important job if you have children. You...the woman must look after the children* again indicating her perception of motherhood as being an obstacle for women's career prospects and also her idea that women have more responsibilities in regard children than men.

LE (23) is about to finish her bachelor degree in Population studies and she talks about how and why she thinks girls are so often perceived to be less valuable than boys in Ugandan society, she relates it to certain aspects within the social structure, particularly bride wealth payments :

*The men pay for the woman. And then they have... she belongs there then. [...]
Because she belongs there...It can be bad. It is in the villages. In the cities it's not so much... At least it's less. [...] And the children you see. Those ones they belong to the man. He owns...here in Africa children [...] are seen as the man's. Not the woman's.*

It seems that most of the informants show an “us-them” perception of women's situation connected to the “rural-urban” divide, perceiving the situation in town to be much more equal than that in the villages. They do not, at this point, seem to include themselves in the situations they describe. The discriminations do not seem to be “felt” but rather acknowledged by the girls, seen as something that is not a good thing but at the same time as something that is not directly related to them. It affects “others”. However, Ch, seem to be annoyed by the lack of senior women at the university saying that *the good thing is that there are many girls at the university, but in top management... then there are males in the top. No females there... or you must look [...] very hard to find them* and LE is at times visibly annoyed by the dowry

situation. The two older girls seem more aware of system inequalities than the younger ones and seem to feel them more or to take them to be more personal. Staying at home with children is the accepted norm and nurturing and caring dispositions are perceived as natural feminine traits. Therefor career women are seen as outside of the norm and as different. Jen's attitudes seem to agree with this as she considers women's main responsibilities to lie within the home. Bourdieu argues that access to power of any kind places women in a 'double bind', stating that if they behave like men, they risk losing the obligatory attributes of 'femininity' and that if they behave like women; they appear incapable and unfit for the job (2001:68). Stereotypes of women's mental dispositions and role as wife and mother give rise to quick judgments like that of women not being as qualified as men for certain positions requiring what are presumed to be masculine attributes (e.g., intelligence, decisiveness, logical reasoning skills, leadership, assertiveness etc.). The stereotypes are tightly woven into the social fabric of Ugandan culture and continually reinforce dichotomous notions of femininity and masculinity. According to Bourdieu, male domination is so anchored in our social practices and our unconsciousness that we barely perceive it; it is so much in correspondence with our expectations that we find it difficult to question it (1998) 2000:9-10). And he argues that masculine domination needs to lose its transparent, taken-for-granted quality, and claims that the most important factors contributing to this type of change are modifications in the educational system and in family structure.

5.3.8 Sexual harassment

As mentioned in sub-chapter 5.2.7 sexual harassment is common both within Ugandan society at large and in schools. Boys' hostility towards girls is widespread and much of this hostility is in the form of sexual harassment. Male teachers are also commonly accused of sexually harassing school girls and several of the informants describe such incidents. The presence of female teachers are seen as protection against these kinds of violations and the lack of female teachers in certain geographical areas and at certain levels of education is a barrier to securing girls access to and persistence within the school system (see Chapter 5.2.1). The problem of harassment is obviously greater in co-educational than single-sex schools and is greater again in schools that attract few female students or where the girls are fewer in numbers compared to boys.

Wi (16), who is studying carpentry at School A, at first seems reluctant to speak about sexual harassment in relation to school and training. Although she says that it can sometimes be

difficult for a girl on building sites and that people are not always nice she does not go into specifics. However, she offers the advice to other girls who want to follow similar career paths that it is advisable to work together with people you trust, male or female, and that certain places especially in the villages are difficult because people don't think a girl can or should do such things. Also, she explains that sometimes it is hard but that she has seen women working on the sites in the city and also suggests that having female teachers as role models help. She then goes on to say that: *...men are sometimes [...] mean... to women, making passes and expecting things [...] You're better... it's better if you have someone with you. If you're not there alone.* (Wi, 17).

At university level male teachers dominate and according to the informants sexual harassment is prevalent. Although in some courses girls now outnumber boys, the university structure is still male dominated. LE (23) describes what she terms a common situation on campus:

A common thing, it usually happens during the exams period, a common thing is where a lecturer finds that you maybe fail...and says either you lay down your clothes or you must retake this course. And some girls they think...they don't want to come back, the fees are a problem, and if next year it is the same teacher and he can do it again. But my advice, failing is not the end of the world. My advice is you should stay strong and come back do it again. You will find money and you must keep your dignity.

Again the situation itself is seen as unavoidable, as a permanent structure, harassment is (always) there, and LE's focus is on the girls' responses to the circumstances, that is, on the conscious choices the girls make when faced with these kinds of propositions, something which was also a key feature in the discussions of girls' retention in school. This kind of individualistic ideology is frequently expressed this way; through discourse that represents social problems as produced by individuals while the broader social and ideological processes are ignored (Langan 2001:3). From this perspective, an individual is often presented as possessing the power to control whether or not violence is experienced; hence it is at the level of the individual that change is conceptualized. LE says that the girls should stay *strong*. She emphasises the importance of *keeping your dignity* and says that failing or having to take a dead year is not the end of the world. Losing your dignity is far worse. This focus on self-perception and choice underlines how important these aspects are for the girls. They cannot control the structures of society which they find themselves in, but they can control their responses to and their perceptions of the various situation.

Similar stories and examples are described by other informants at university level, and there seem to be little done to address this problem by the university administration. Male lecturers will demand sexual favours in exchange for better marks or for not failing female students' papers or exams. Very often the individual lectures' personalities are cited as the problem, the girls refer to them and their conceptions rather than to socio-cultural factors or a greater system of inequality and gender based violence. One girl (R) describes how her exam papers "disappeared" and how the lecturer asked her to have sex with him in case the papers then would maybe be found. She described this lecturer as being *particularly difficult*. For the girls, if they end up in a situation like that, their best option according to themselves is to take a *dead year and come back later*. They underline the dangers of doing what the lecturers ask, saying that it leads to the girls losing their dignity and therefore making wrong decisions again later.

There are times when it becomes so tricky for a girl; maybe you failed a paper and want to talk to the lecturer. He says maybe you go the other way –it means sex. You have to have sex with the male lecturer to pass your paper [...] and so many end up in prostitution because it's the only way she understands to get money.

(Ch, 21)

Ch also suggests that by agreeing to have sex the girls lose the respect of the lecturer. And she says this is not good as the lecturers then also do not respect the other girls, thereby implying that the girls (or some girls) are responsible for the lecturers' behaviour and that girls are perceived as not worthy of respect due to their *compliance*. So sexual harassment within the education system is sometimes perceived or accepted by girls as being (at least partially) the victims fault, reflecting some of the general perceptions of sexual violence or harassment as being the woman's responsibility in Ugandan society. On the other hand, LE's attitude towards and ways of speaking about this reveals a vehement antagonism directed towards the academic institutions and society at large. She is angry when describing examples and blames the lecturers and the patriarchal system that allows discrimination of and violence against women. She never blames the victim although, as seen in the quote on page 81, she explains why some girls give in, mentioning financial problems as the major reasons, and states the importance of not doing this out of concerns for the girl's dignity and self-worth which she considers more important than receiving an education.

The university informants also describe how the male students constantly pursue the girls and also how many of the girls respond in ways that the informants label *foolish* and *immoral*:

Also male students... some...very many...are always after the girls at campus. Sometimes they have many girlfriends, maybe four or five. And it is bad... [...] ...Girls think... they don't think. These girls in this country, sometimes they don't do the better things, they make bad decisions.

(R, 23)

The girls also explain that when living at campus one has to be careful when walking alone at night and that rape is fairly common. They again seem to indicate that some of the girls themselves are responsible for this seeing as they do not take precautions or have any common sense. However, they are frustrated that for example in the cases of pregnancies it is the girls who takes all the blame and have to stop studying, nothing happens to the boys: *[At uni...] ...Some get pregnant, some you know, they just get raped... And some...It's not so easy. They get in trouble...And this...these things happen to them...To the girls... [...] ...for the boys there is no problem.*

(Ch, 21)

One girl (Es, 17) says her father will not let her study at university because of the dangers and troubles she can get herself into. This again shows the cultural emphasis on the girls as the ones responsible for causing undesirable situations. Es father is not against her getting an education however, and she is to study from home doing an online course in insurance when she finishes her A-levels. As mentioned earlier the girls at the boarding school did not indicate any form of sexual harassment by their class- and school mates, they had plenty of stories related to other schools however, and there seemed to be a general attitude that day schools were worse than boarding school. At a boarding school you have teachers and other personnel around all the time, *someone always has night duty and sometimes even you have guards* (Pe, 17), whereas at day schools teachers' responsibilities end when school finishes and the girls have to walk home and deal with the boys from school and also others on the way. *I walk far to school. I get there by foot. Sometimes I can't manage. It's almost two hour to come here. And home. Every day. And the road can be dangerous. Sometimes. Here it's very... some people... they are not...normally... Some people are dangerous [...] the men...you have to be careful*

(P, P4)

Several of the girls said they were afraid to walk alone because the risk of rape was ever-present. They also explained that if a girl was raped she was usually blamed and often laughed at and bullied by the community. Furthermore, if the girl gets pregnant parents may throw her out as she has shamed them. So the fear of rape among the girls are not only related to the actual physical violence but also to a great extent to the social consequences, their subsequent lack of support, and their lower standing in the community. Even when it is clear that they have been wronged, the cases are not carried to a conclusion by the justice system. Again, we see how women's lower status brings about unequal treatment.

Interestingly, when the girls were asked not about sexual harassment but more specific questions in regard unwelcome attention from their male school mates, like teasing or inappropriate behaviour, the girls suddenly mentioned several things; boys calling them names, talking about their body parts (breasts or buttocks) and other sexually related comments or jokes. Most of these behaviours were conducted in public, during lunch or before classes and the teachers did not seem to be aware of it or paying much attention to this type of behaviour from the boys. This lack of reactions to, at least partially, open forms of harassments may give the students the sense that sexual harassment is normal and appropriate. Or at least give them the idea that this is not in fact sexual harassment, indicated in the way the girls did not mention this in talks about sexual harassments but rather when asked about teasing and forms of other inappropriate behaviour. Sexual harassment seems to be perceived as involving touching or rape whereas verbal and non-verbal interactions are not perceived as sexually harassing. The girls and women are frequently blamed for causing these kinds of responses themselves, by for instance acting or dressing inappropriately. In 2014 the government passed what was labelled "the miniskirt bill" by the media and which caused several attacks on women because they were wearing "inappropriate" clothing. This tendency of blaming the victim or clothing instead of the perpetrators seems to be prevalent in regard sexual violence cases. Women have historically been denied a voice to express gender-based injustice in private and public spaces in Uganda and LE and the other girls seem to feel that not much has changed in this regard. Girls still handle these issues alone, in private, and very few structures to help victims of abuse or violence seem to be in place.

5.3.9 Perspectives on marriage and married life

In Uganda there are three main types of marriage and these are: civil marriage: marriage contracted before an official Government registrar, religious marriage: marriage performed by one of the recognized religions in the country, and customary marriage: marriage contracted between two families through the performance of marriage rites as required by a particular culture(s) within which the marriage is taking place. I will focus on customary marriages here as these also influence the other forms of marriages. Customary marriages are potentially polygamous. Many men are in so-called “urban polygamous” relationships where they have one official wife in town and additional wives in the village (on some cases these women do not know of each other). Customary marriages also include the bride wealth system within which exact practices varies among the different tribes. As mentioned above customary marriages influence the other types of marriages and a failure to pay the required bride wealth for instance is reason enough to stop a church wedding.

Of the girls interviewed four mentioned in various ways coming from polygamous households. One was the child of a first wife that had been left by her husband (but not divorced) and where the girls' father now had a new family she had little contact with. To her the practice was seen as an easy way for a man to leave his family without having to face the potential shame of a divorce. She had very little contact with her father although he sporadically contributed to her school fees and he was mainly concerned with his new wife and children. Another girl, LE, described her mother's marriage like this:

My mother married my father, she was 15. It was... Sometimes it is normal in Uganda to marry young. She found some children in the home already...but... my father had...he separated from my stepmother... and there were 6 (children) there at home...

The children seem much attached to their mothers and according to some of the informants the other wives and their children are often seen as competitors. For LE it was important to emphasise that the other wife had to move away and when talking about her siblings she usually referred to the children of her mother only. Also, many of the girls when asked about their family background would say they had for example “three brothers and four sisters; same mother, same father”, emphasising this last point. According to the Uganda Demographic Survey (DHS) (1995) the practice of polygamy is rather widespread, about 30 % of women and 15 % of men are in polygamous unions and there is little difference between urban and rural areas (Kwesiga 2005:137). According to the 2002 UBOS-population census,

educated women are less likely to be in polygamous marriages. This corresponds with the girl's stories both in terms of their backgrounds, of the girls stating to come from polygamous households the mothers had very little formal education, and with the girls' own attitudes. For the girls in Northern Uganda, of which many had to stop after P7 and whose parents' had little formal education, polygamy seemed to be an unavoidable situation in which they found themselves. Moreover, in entering polygamous marriages, the girls are seen and sometimes describe themselves as participating in a historical tradition and as continuing a "way of life" that was emphasised as being inherently "African". For the girls from Central, all with secondary or higher education, polygamy was not seen as an acceptable option, although they explained in some cases girls had no choice due to financial difficulties, and they were very vocal in their descriptions of the negative effects on women and children describing the marriage form as "old-fashioned", "traditional" and "rural". In their view the practice is connected with village-life, although the censuses (1995, 2002) did not show such a clear difference between rural and urban areas but rather a difference in the married women's levels of education.

In Uganda to live alone is regarded as unnatural, and all men and women are expected to marry. The chief end of marriage is procreation, and failure to conceive usually leads a man to take on other wives or to leave the barren one. Infertility may also lead to refund of bride wealth as the woman has not fulfilled her duties as a wife. The idea that the man can be responsible for the situation is rarely, if ever contemplated (Kwesiga 2005:136-145). Because of the importance placed on marriage and procreation, girls are trained into the roles of mothers and wives. Early marriages are common and when a girl is married and has children there is no need for her to go to school as she is fulfilling her duties as mother and wife. Early marriages lead to early pregnancies and subsequently to many children something pointed out by several of the informants and described by LE (23) like this: *The early marriages... When a person gets married at the age of what... 15...it's...how many children do you expect her to have by the end of 30?*

Bride wealth refers to payment in cash or kind by the bridegroom to the bride's parents. In Uganda, payment of bride wealth represents the marriage certificate and it constitutes legal evidence also for civil marriages. The most important issues in this context regarding bride wealth are what the payment signifies. Bride wealth permanently transfers the girl or woman's sexual and reproductive rights and abilities to the man and his lineage, and children belong to the husband (Kwesiga 2005). The effects of bride wealth on the status of women are

rather obvious. Girls and women are effectively made the property of their husbands and the custom encourages early marriages because the girls are seen as a source of wealth. LE explains the situation many young girls' find themselves in like this... *parents can't pay school fees and maybe not feed them, so they sell them and get... the girls get married. Maybe at 12 or 13... They are wealth...so the parents use them. That is our tradition- the girls are regarded as wealth and they force the girls into marriage.*

The marked-oriented manner in which many communities carry out these transactions contributes to dehumanise women. Most of the informants were well aware of this situation pointing out the negative effects of marriage for girls especially in regard early marriages, bride wealth and pregnancies. Several pointed to the fact that the married women were indebted to their husbands and his family, they had paid money for her and therefore she had to work for them. LE explains that she does not want to get married because men and their families will treat girls bad:

You know... if the man pays to get the wife... the dowry. It means it's not good. To be a girl you are a commodity. You are like, you are not part of the family but you... are part of the wealth... It's not good for... It makes... I feel we don't have equality...For the women... [...] ...And the woman must work for the man. She must be working for the family. The man just goes to sit under a tree...And the woman is working...Always...And why? Because he has paid the dowry for them...She owes him... That is why they have to work so much...[...] ...No. I want to be on my own! I just don't like giving up everything... [...] ...It's a bit too complicated... [...] ...there are no respect...and their families...after the dowry...You are nothing!

(LE (23))

LE's ideas about marriage and the marital situation for women differ from that of the (younger) girls. Although, these girls also seem to think there is a loss of independence involved (they worry they will not be able to work), they still seem to think of marriage and children as a good thing and as something they want. As illustrated in the conversation presented below about their future plans regarding marriage and children these girls express an attitude where they see combining careers and marriage as an option although this is an option that strongly depends on finding a husband that share these values.

Pe (17):

I want to get married. And to have four children...I think. Maybe three (laughs). But I want to... [...] You know, sometimes in Uganda. If you find a husband... or... maybe he doesn't want you to work... And then, I think, it's complicated...but with the right one... I want to work.

Es (16):

For me...I want to be independent. You know, to be independent and look after myself. I don't want to rely... to always rely on someone. Like a husband. I want... I want maybe a husband that is... if he is ok with me working...I want children (laughs).

Ma (17):

I'm sure I will get married. And children...I want four. But it's...not for a long time (laughs... [...] ...we're young you know.

Pe (17)

M will marry a doctor...and they'll be...working together...(laughs)...I think I will look for one...later...maybe at the university...

The three girls are from middle to upper class families. They grew up in “modern” nuclear families with father, mother and four to six children (apart from Pe whose father died when she was little). Four children seem to be a common number for middle class and above families and the number is in accordance with the government’s recommendations. The fertility rate or births per woman in Uganda is at 5.9 (World Factbook 2014) and the country has one of the fastest growing populations in the world.

LE comes from a family background where her father had two wives and although she stresses the fact that the other wife, the first wife, is no longer living with them (or is dead, she is not too clear on this point) she alludes to problems her mother experienced when getting married and moving in with the father. Furthermore, she seems to have friends or relatives that have experienced hardships due to their husbands drinking or violence and she has worked in rural areas in a kind of social worker capacity. Her bachelor-dissertation is about domestic violence against women and children and she does not see herself getting married in the near future. She is certain that marriage means the end of her freedom and her independence and she

refers to all the work and difficulties she has endured to get herself an education, she does not want that to be for nothing:

*I am not ready for this...marriage... Why! What is the use? I have toiled for my life!
Why have a man put me in a situation... Why get a child so early... I don't want to
depend on a man. I want to stand on my own! I don't want to be supported...
[...]...That's why I'm single, I need a free life!*

Whereas the girls in Kampala seem to have either romantic ideas regarding their future wedding or husband and children, or rather hostile attitudes towards the repression of women within the marriage institution, the girls of Gulu have a more inevitable view of marriage and married life. Many of the girls are already married, or have children, and they do not seem to consider alternatives to marriage like some of the Central girls do. Although it is not normal for married girls to pursue an education some of them try but they describe their situations as rather difficult.

I am married... My husband works in the shop...in the mechanics... I work(ed) at home... but the teacher from that school...he came and said I could study at the...here. And my husband he says it's ok. But I think maybe he don't like it (laughs)... But he comes to see me and we meet outside there (points). I wish... I hope I can be a teacher... To work... If I manage to finish here...I married... I was 16. It's so normal. But I have... There are no children yet.

Ma (18)

Another girl (19) says she is married and has two children but that her husband has left her, she does not know where he is, and that she is now struggling to look after boys. She has enrolled in a course for teenage mothers and hopes to get an education that can get her a job and an income. She describes the situation for girls in her area as very difficult. In her case her mother is helping her, looking after the children while she is at school. She says that education is not easy to achieve when you find yourself married with children at the age of sixteen.

Within Ugandan society universal marriage is the norm and the expectations and aspirations of the girls within this society are shaped by this requirement. Marriage requirements and expectations to produce children present a strong barrier to women's education as being a "wife" is seen as the ultimate occupation for a woman. This is especially true for women who

come from poor backgrounds and with parents with little formal education. It seems in these cases that women, when marrying, are left to wrestle with their subordinate status, and it may seem likely that they often resign themselves to coping strategies rather than seeking out alternatives that could enable them to contest the existing frameworks.

As seen above the levels of education influences girls' marriage behaviour displaying how an ability to get a job and thereby be financially independent gives women options to marriage. The 2002 Population and Housing Census showed that educational attainment has a profound effect on marriage among Uganda's women. In general, in the younger age groups, the more educated a woman is, the less likely it is for her to be married. More interesting about these more highly educated women is that even beyond the ages when education is expected to be operating mechanically by removing them from the marriage market, substantial proportions of them still remain unmarried. This suggests education of women operates also by changing their attitudes and to a certain extent liberating them from universal dependency on marriage. However, most of the educated girls also marry eventually. My informants seem to look upon marriage as an essential part of life but they seek equally educated husbands with similar views on family and family life as themselves not wishing to give up their careers or independency. One of the main points made by the girls in regard marriage is the need to remain financially independent.

5.4 Summary

In this section we have seen how the girls themselves experience and relate to the issue of gender in Ugandan society and in school. They have through their stories given a glimpse of what it is like to be a school girl in Uganda and have shared their own ideas and analysis of the situation as they perceive it to be both for themselves and for other girls in the country. Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasised that the cultural world which people inhabit is not a container or a superstructure embracing the human beings in it, but rather a cultural interpretation that has become realized, materialized, and enacted by the people who share it together. Hannerz (1992:9-13) argued that the individual's perspective or version of socially organized meaning, is in large part a product of her network experience. From this we may suggest that the girls' perspectives differ not only according to where they live but also according to whom they know or meet along the way. Furthermore, social structures and culture are inter-subjective and are grounded in the social interaction between individuals (see Chapter 4 p. 42). Gender influences ideas of what is considered right or valuable. The girls'

responses shed light on the gender-related roles and conceptions of the lives they imagine as their future. This is particularly evident in the chapters on marriage and studies. Through their ways of challenging or navigating restrictive norms and practices, these girls provide realistic and positive models of what it means to be a girl or a woman in Uganda today. They actively engage in decision-making in regard their futures and lives, within the frameworks of which they must operate, and convey a determination and perception of self-worth that challenges stereotypical views of the women as meek and submissive.

Although the girls tell stories of considerable hardships due to financial troubles, discrimination and fear of rape or violence, and the teachers paint a picture of a school system that is often unaccommodating to girls, the female perspective seem to be one of determination and optimism rather than cynicism and hindrance. The informants may refer to inequalities in the system and to gender-based violence and harassments as unavoidable and “normal” in their communities, however, they still see themselves as agents of social progress and believe in wider opportunities for themselves than those traditionally offered by society.

6 Concluding remarks

The girls and women who have told their stories in the preceding chapter, analysed their own situation and shared their concerns and ambitions, described social and financial circumstances and histories that are quite different from each other and which represent a variety of causes, effects, particulars and dimensions. However, collectively the stories represent voices, which even though they are individual, cover a wide range of issues which when coming together comprise an overview of the situation within which the girls and women find themselves in present day Uganda. Through these narratives they provide insights not only into their personal histories but also reveal aspects of the bigger picture, of some of the mechanisms at work in regard gender and education for girls in Uganda. When discussing or dealing with gender questions it is useful to analyse the various ways in which gender presents itself within the institutional frameworks. In this case, the frameworks are the particular schools as well as the education system and the society at large. Through considering how much of the students' and teachers' unconscious perceptions of gender are coming from underlying ideas reflected in curriculums, school regulations and "accepted wisdoms" in the communities, it becomes easier to gain an understanding of why gender discrimination is still prevalent even though gendered challenges in relation to education have been an official priority in Uganda for several years. The schools' and society's continuing focus on the differences between boys and girls contributes to strengthening gender inequalities as do the social structures within the systems which permit gender division. Gender division is deeply rooted in every aspect of social life as well as in the education system in Uganda and the two systems feed each other and keep the inequalities in place.

By looking at the gender narratives that are produced about and within the institutionalised framework one realises how the institution explains and legitimises the prevailing norms and ideas about gender and gender roles and pass it on to further generations. In this study the focus has been on how females perceive their own situation as girls and women in the education system and furthermore on how gender is constructed through education- culture. Through the informants' stories we see how the education- culture explain and justify things being done in a certain way and how the institutionalised framework is structured in a particular way that both encourage gendered stereotypes and ideas. Furthermore, they show how the girls and women take part in gender-creating processes and represent/present themselves and their communities within existing or available frameworks that carry strong expectations and demands regarding what are seen as acceptable behaviour for women or

girls. Some of the informants rebel against these expectations with considerable force and skill; however, in spite of their efforts, the structures are evidently in place and it is clear from what they say that some of these girls may be perceived as anomalies, something outside the general norm, by many of the people they encounter in their daily lives and also in some instances by themselves. According to Lorber (in Ore 2011:60) individuals learn what is expected, see what is expected, act and react in expected ways in various social interactions throughout their lives, and thus simultaneously construct and maintain the gender order. She argues that members of a social group neither make up gender as they go along nor do they exactly replicate what was done before. In her opinion human beings produce gender, behaving in the ways they learn are appropriate for their status, or resisting or rebelling against these norms.

The notion of the schools or classrooms as social fields makes it possible to consider and analyse how the various teachers and students, with their different social perspectives and intentions, may contribute to or rather create specific classroom practices that are seen as natural or inevitable by themselves and other students. This corresponds to the idea that the education system (or any other field) takes the norms, ideas, beliefs and so on from dominant groups, and enforces these through systems of power relations so that it is registered as legitimate and thereby reproducing and legitimising relations of domination (Gates 1998:17). Cultural mechanisms such as education impose a dominant perspective on the rest of the population in order to legitimate their power. According to Bourdieu, male domination is so anchored in our social practices and our unconsciousness that we barely perceive it; it is so much in correspondence with our expectations that we find it difficult to question. Bourdieu refers to male domination as a prime example of symbolic violence— *a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling* (Bourdieu (1998) 2000: 9-10) that is; exercised through the everyday practices of social life. To understand this form of domination we must analyse the social mechanisms and institutions—family, school, church, and state—that transform history into nature and eternalise the arbitrary. Symbolic violence, though labelled “gentle”, is the most powerful weapon of male domination argues Bourdieu, as, despite an essential invisibility, it creates the conditions or possibilities for other, more immediate and explicit forms of violence, either economic or physical.

However, Bourdieu's main concern does not seem to be with the analysis of the exercise of masculine power, but rather with analysing women's apparent submission to it. In this paper I have sought to avoid this position of someone seemingly lecturing victims of domination about their complicity in their own victimisation. Rather, my focus in this paper has been to highlight which aspects of the masculine "power systems" that are actually perceived or felt by the girls, and to hear them describe and explain their reasoning behind them as well as their interpretations and reactions to them.

Something that struck me while conducting this research was the girl's confidence in their own abilities and in their potential possibilities. There seemed to be an undercurrent of determination among the girls and even though they faced numerous challenges they refused to give up and referred to their responsibilities towards themselves in ensuring their future as an explanation for their determination. Most papers on gender inequalities tend to describe (like Bourdieu) girls as victims of discriminating institutionalised structures in society and highlight, like the teachers in this study, various approaches and interventions to improve their social standing and prospects. Bourdieu argues that masculine domination needs to lose its transparent, taken-for-granted quality, and claims that the most important factors contributing to this type of change are modifications in the educational system and in family structure. These are of course important concerns that deserve considerable attention. However, I find it important to highlight that the girls through their narratives show themselves to be far from passive victims of these structures, but rather committed individuals engaged in numerous actions and interventions that make it possible for them to create opportunities and to reach goals they set for themselves. It was my aim to gain access into the conceptual world of the girls and to get a better understanding of how they actually perceive their position within society and the education system. Although their ideas and conceptions are determined by the local and regional context, the findings are enlightening and inspiring beyond the Ugandan situation. Social change that involves a change in gender norms and practices does not happen by itself, but through social modifications and by changing the collective consciousness of how people define male and femaleness. Through the notion of habitus, Bourdieu expresses the way in which individuals 'become themselves'—develop attitudes and dispositions and also the ways in which those individuals engage in general life practices. He argues that schooling provides not only the transmission of technical knowledge and skills, but also socialization into a particular cultural tradition. The schools conserve, transmit, and inculcate the cultural norms of a society and, therefore, perform the cultural reproduction function (Bourdieu, 197:178). This notion is supported by the teachers who

refers to how the schools often reproduce traditional gender roles by adhering to them (through the lack of female teachers and role models, male dominated structures, teachers' attitudes towards the girls compared to the boys, the hidden curriculum etc.) In Uganda discourse around gender and gender roles within and out of school tend to build on notions of masculinity, femininity and difference, in which biological differences play a primary role. This makes challenging these concepts difficult as they are perceived as natural and not constructed. However, despite these problems the informants seem able to challenge and navigate some of the views and to pursue their education and career paths although they do not always seem to think it will be possible to change attitudes. However, they repeatedly demonstrate their perception of themselves as being in charge of their own destiny.

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