

Exploring the Teachers' Role in the Social Construction of Gender through the Hidden Culture Curriculum and Pedagogy: A Case of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT In this qualitative study the researchers adopted a case study design genre and utilized multiple data collection tools: focus group discussions, individual phenomenological interviews and discourse analysis to unmask the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean school curriculum. Our analysis of data thus involved content and discourse analyses of curricular material as well as the coding and decoding of participants' responses in accordance with the emerging themes. This approach was motivated by our quest to obtain deeper insights by examining the phenomenon in its natural setting. As a result they unraveled a wide range of the gender biases and prejudices embodied in the school curriculum, which entrench gender disparities by polarizing the educational and occupational aspirations of boys and girls along gender lines. These results followed the interviewing of a sample of 40 participants distributed as 30 school-girls and 10 teachers and were also complemented by the content and discourse analyses conducted to selected curricular material. The participants were conveniently and purposively sampled. The results also revealed that through their classroom pedagogy teachers play an influential role in the perpetual production and peddling of gender role ideologies and stereotypes that culminate in the consequent gender polarization of social roles for boys and girls or men and women in society. The study also revealed that in spite of the level of consciousness on the need for equality and equity between women and men in society, the Zimbabwean school curriculum continues to play a significant role in the reproduction and structuring of gender role stereotypes, prejudices and disparities.

INTRODUCTION

Early differences in the treatment of girls and boys in their social interaction by significant others (Mead 1934) can result in enduring learning patterns. Skolnick (2011) reported that children spend more time with their teachers than any other adult with the exception of their parents. Consequently, teachers' expectations and actions have a profound effect on student aspirations and achievement as well as self-esteem. What teachers say and do not say, their body language, what they do and who they call upon, form a hidden curriculum that is more powerful than any textbook lesson (Sadker and Sadker 2004). These authors further contend that the

self esteem and aspirations of girls are affected by a plethora of in school and out of school factors: gender role socialization, teacher attitudes and expectations, gender role stereotypes and the level of attention they receive from teachers in the school and classroom.

Gordon (1995) notes that the constant reinforcement for passivity often given to girls by male members of their society results in a decline in their independence and self-esteem. Research studies, such as those by Nhundu (2007), Dorsey (1996), Sadker and Sadker (2004) reveal that there are numerous examples where girls are denied opportunities to excel in the classroom through both the explicit and hidden forms of curriculum and pedagogy. Sometimes the level of sexism is subtle, and the bias often unconscious. At other times and as part and parcel of the hidden culture curriculum, girls are rewarded for their conformity to classroom rules by simply being ignored, thus they pay a huge price for their compliance. It is in this sense that fem-

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inist writers such as Gordon (1995) and Dorsey (1996) maintain that as victims of benign neglect, girls are often penalized for doing what they should and lose ground as they go through school. In some situations sex segregation, both during play and in the classroom, polarizes the sexes and contributes to female invisibility. Well-meaning teachers often think they protect girls by this separation when, in fact, they encourage stereotypical patterns of passivity in girls and aggression in boys (Wellesley College Center for Research on Women 1992; Sadker and Sadker 2004).

Despite the level of gender awareness campaigns in Zimbabwe, girls and women continue to lose confidence and voice in many spheres of their life (Gaidzanwa 1997). The most profound effects of gender bias against girls in the curriculum and classroom pedagogy are evident in high schools. During adolescence many girls become over-socialized into contemporary stereotypical definitions of femininity. The messages they receive from the popular culture and media cause many girls to become preoccupied with physical appearance and perfection. Many of the models which appear in leading fashion magazines today are commonly 23 percent below normal body weight (Keyes 2010). Eating disorders, once considered prevalent among young women on college campuses, are now common among high school girls. It has been estimated that as many as 66 percent of high school girls are engaged in dieting (Pipher 2006). The stress of dieting and appearance undoubtedly uses energy that is necessary for learning in school (Wellesley College Center for Research on Women 1992; Sadker and Sadker 2004).

Keyes (2006) interviewed adults that attended high school during the late 90s and found that being popular was a top priority for girls. This was also true in the late 60s, when James Coleman (1961) conducted his classic study, on the *The Adolescent Society*. Sadker and Sadker (2004) found that in our present society, many girls think that being intelligent conflicts with popularity. High school dreams consist of the following: to go to the prom with the right date; to be a cheerleader; to be chosen as most popular; and to be elected class monitor. In Zimbabwe during most of the twentieth century an invisible line dissected the courses offered in the nation's high schools. In the division of curricular, home economics was a female field, pre-

paring girls for their roles as wives and mothers, while shop was reserved for boys. Women considered incapable of learning mathematics and science when they were girls were written off by both teachers and parents and bore the scars of sexist schooling (Sadker and Sadker 2004). Finally, girls are now learning the lessons that mathematics matters. Girls are at last staying in mathematics courses longer than before. By feeling sorry for the girls enrolled in mathematics and science courses, which they find difficult, school counselors often dismiss girls. Such a situation has the potential to harm their ambitions or desire to break new ground (Mutekwe 2007; Meyer 2008). This dismissal is less likely to be offered to male students. Although young girls may fail to realize the high cost of their maths and science courses' dismissal, it eventually comes to haunt them when making career choices. When girls self-select out of maths, science or computer technology, they make decisions that often affect their life courses (Sadker and Sadker 2004). While Zimbabwean girls appeared to gain ground in the sciences between 1990 and 2000, there is evidence that this trend is reversing (Nhundu 2007). It is well documented that something occurs between junior high and high school that causes girls to lose interest, perceive science, mathematics, and computer technology as masculine endeavors and opt out of more difficult courses (Wellesley College Center for Research on Women 1992; Chapman 1997; Sadker and Sadker 2004).

The influence of books in propagating the patriarchal ideology in Zimbabwean is often compounded by teacher attitudes and expectations towards their learners (Odaga and Heneveld 1995). Meyer (2008), Mutekwe (2007) and Nhundu (2007), writing from a feminist standpoint epistemology share these sentiments maintaining that the patriarchal values embodied in the school curriculum makes girls as a whole to be disadvantaged compared to boys as a whole. In our concurrence with this view, we assert that in Zimbabwe boys generally have access to all the *educational goodies* or relevant cultural capital (Bourdieu 1992) such as study time, which are systematically denied to girls largely because of the ideology of patriarchy that is embedded in the school curriculum especially through text books, teaching strategies (pedagogy) adopted and in the teachers' attitudes and expectations of pupils' gender roles. As a result of being de-

nied making history through the school curricular, pedagogy and being discouraged by teacher attitudes and expectations (Gordon 1995) from taking crucial courses that lead to key careers, it becomes abundantly clear that the high school girls often pay a steep price for their journey from adolescence to womanhood as their options of careers are limited (Sadker and Sadker 1994).

METHODOLOGY

For this qualitative study the researchers employed the case study design to explore and unmask the prevalence of gender role biases and the patriarchal ideology embedded in the Zimbabwean school curriculum. The motivation to adopt a qualitative design for this research particularly the case study derived from the researchers' desire to examine phenomena in their natural setting (Lincoln and Guba 2002) and to understand the meaning of participants' lived experiences. Since the purpose of this study was to explore learners and educators' views of curricular values and ideologies that impinge upon the learners' educational and career aspirations, the researchers employed content and discourse analyses as well as focus group and individual phenomenological interviews as instruments for data collection from our target population of educators and learners from 3 Zimbabwean schools conveniently and purposively sampled.

Focus Group and Individual Phenomenological Interviews

Focus group interviews as a research technique is a semi-structured group discussion, moderated by a discussion leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of obtaining information by means of group interaction on a designated topic (McLafferty 2004). Through the use of focus group interviews the researchers were able to explore and generate a widening of responses activating details of perspectives and releasing inhibitions might have otherwise discouraged participants from disclosing important information (Dzvimbo et al. 2010). This method produced data rich in detail that is often difficult to achieve with other research methods, because participants built on each other's ideas and comments to provide in-depth and value-added insights (Meyer 2008). Individual phenomenolog-

ical interviews were held with teachers to solicit data for this study. The technique is described as a one on one question and answer session between the researcher and his subjects. Through the interview guide the researchers utilized both structured and unstructured questions. The aim was to explore teachers' classroom practices, lived experiences, beliefs and attitudes about the prevalence of the patriarchy in the school curriculum. The interviews were initiated by clarifying the purpose of the research and the interview as well as reassuring teachers of the confidential nature of the interviews. They had to be at ease before the interview proceedings commenced, especially in the face of a voice or audio recorder that was used to record the data. Both focus group and individual phenomenological interviews were adopted because they are amenable to the useful gathering of data regarding participants' experiences, understandings, attitudes and beliefs (McLafferty 2004; Meyer 2008).

Discourse Analysis

According to Fairclough (2003) discourses always involve more than language and encompass coordinating language with ways of acting, interacting, valuing, believing and feelings. As such in this study the researchers took them to include representations of how things are and have been as well as how things might or could be (Gee 2000). In this study discourses were considered as occurring at three levels: action, representation and identification. Using Fairclough's conception of texts, the discourse analysis employed in this study focused on texts as encompassing both the spoken and written modes of communication. This means that even the data from focus group and individual face to face interviews was also subjected to discourse analyses with a view to establishing the hidden culture curriculum (Barrow 2005).

Ethical Considerations, Research Questions and Procedure

The researchers dealt with the management of several methodological difficulties ranging from avoidance of interviewer bias, ensuring the confidentiality of participants' responses to the difficulty arising from distinguishing data from the researchers' interpretation of the data. Since

the first research question for this study was to establish the extent to which the Zimbabwean school curriculum disseminates gender role biases especially patriarchal values to learners, the researchers' effort in pursuit of answers to this question focused on the content and discourse analyses of randomly sampled text books at the 3 schools chosen as the sites for this study. In these text books the researchers investigated cases of the portrayal of boys and girls or men and women in them. The second research question sought to understand the tension between the teachers' attitudes and expectations about gender and the curriculum and how their practice was influenced by the context in which they operated. Pursuant to this objective a structured interview guide was developed and 10 teachers were interviewed individually through face to face sessions lasting for about 30 minutes each. The third research question sought to establish students' views on gender issues in the curriculum in a bid to corroborate the data from the purposively sampled text books, content analysis and the research participants. Pursuant to this question we solicited data through focus group interviews with 30 ordinary level students, with each interview session being of 30 minutes duration.

Theoretical Perspective Adopted as the Lens for the Study

Both social constructionists and social constructivists concur that gender is a social construct. This means that notions of gender differences are taught or learnt and reinforced in social interactions within social institutions such as the family, school and the media. Social constructs are generally understood to be the by-products of countless human choices rather than laws resulting from divine will or nature (Hacking 2002). This is not usually taken to imply a radical anti-determinism, however. Social constructionism and social constructivism are sociological theories of knowledge that consider how social phenomena or objects of consciousness develop in social contexts. A social construction (also called a social construct) is a concept or practice that is the construct (or artifact) of a particular group (Christie 2008). Thus the claim that gender is socially constructed implies that gender, as currently understood, is not an inevitable result of biology, but highly contin-

gent on social and historical processes. In addition, depending on who is making the claim, it may mean that our current understanding of gender is harmful, and should be modified or eliminated, to the extent possible. When we say that something is socially constructed, we are focusing on its dependence on contingent variables of our social selves rather than any inherent quality that it possesses in itself. The underlying assumptions on which social constructivism is typically seen to be based are reality, knowledge and learning as products of the active social interaction of humans (Searle 1995).

Social constructionism is usually opposed to essentialism which instead defines specific phenomena in terms of inherent and transhistorical essences independent of conscious beings that determine the categorical structure of reality (Glaserfeld 1995; Hacking 2002). Constructionism became prominent in the U.S. with Berger and Luckman's 1967 book, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Berger and Luckman argue that all knowledge, including the most basic, taken-for-granted common sense knowledge of everyday reality, is derived from and maintained by social interaction (Berger and Luckman 1967).

When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding their common knowledge of reality becomes reinforced. Since this common sense knowledge is negotiated by people, human typifications, significations and institutions come to be presented as part of an objective reality, particularly for future generations who were not involved in the original process of negotiation (Hacking 2002; Searle 1995). For example, as parents negotiate rules for their children to follow, those rules confront the children as externally produced 'givens' that they cannot change. Gender role becomes one of these 'givens' since it is a product of social structural interactions. A major focus of social constructionism is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived social reality. It involves looking at the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalized, known, and made into tradition by humans. The social construction of reality is an ongoing, dynamic process that is (and must be) reproduced by people acting on their interpretations and their knowledge of it. Because social

constructs as facets of reality and objects of knowledge are not given by nature, they must be constantly maintained and re-affirmed in order to persist. This process also introduces the possibility of change: what justice is and what it means shifts from one generation to the next.

Hacking in the '*The Social Construction of What?*' notes that social construction talk is often in reference not only to worldly items, like things and facts, but also to beliefs about them. It is relevant to note that this perspective is often correctly closely connected with many contemporary theories such as the symbolic interactionist, which emphasizes the view that the meanings people create are based on everyday experiences (Blackledge and Hunt 1985). People's gender roles are thus a product of their experiences in their social structure and institutions. Other theoretical perspectives available to account for the social construction of gender through the curriculum and pedagogy include the feminist theories, which attribute girls and women's social disadvantage to patriarchy (male domination). The study thus utilizes not only the social constructionist or symbolic interactionist approach but also adopted feminist views as well as the Gramscian notions of ideology, hegemony and commonsense to view the problem of the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean school curriculum.

Adopting Gramsci's theory this study posits that the problem of patriarchal values embedded in the Zimbabwean school curricular (Gordon 1995; Mutekwe 2011) stems from the hegemonic, ideological and commonsense perspectives of the dominant social groups of that country. It becomes important to note that Gramsci's social and political theories have particular pertinence to this study of the content of education and pedagogy, both in its institutional forms (schools), and in its purposive concern with the individuals and the social consciousness of those who pass through its structures as students or as teachers.

From a Gramscian perspective therefore, the problem of constraints in a people's life is located in his idea of hegemony, a concept he develops to refer to forms of supremacy obtained by some social groups (males or men in this case) primarily by consent rather than coercion, by moral and intellectual leadership rather than by domination (Christie 2008). He recognizes that the power of a leading social group is maintained

by a combination of consent and coercion; however, consent through ideological justification is the normal form of hegemonic control in capitalist society, with coercion visible only in moments of particular crisis (Gramsci 1994). In its broadest sense, hegemony is a relational concept that includes consideration of relations of coercion as well as consent in the maintenance of control. In this study the problematic aspect of the school as an institution is that it serves as an agent of the dissemination of hegemonic ideologies such as gender and patriarchy, which are embodied in the curricula in both the formal and hidden forms (Gramsci 1994). Hegemonic consent is not always strong or committed on the part of the persons in the mass. Girls or women may for example, support the existing gendered occupational stratification or arrangements from a sense of active commitment, or because they are unable to conceive of an alternative (Christie 2008; Mutekwe 2011).

In the latter sense, hegemony expresses the limits to the conceivable, the boundaries of commonsense (Gramsci 1994). In considering ideology, Gramsci asserted its materiality and its integral association with economic structures within the historical bloc. He thus distinguished between organic and arbitrary ideologies, viewing the former as necessary in a given structure. For Gramsci, organic ideologies organize people and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their social position, or struggle among other things. In this sense organic ideologies are part and parcel of the exercise of hegemony by male social groups. Since individual consciousness is a social construct (Christie 1990), and that individuals are formed by an ensemble of social relations, some necessary, some voluntary, and all formed over time, people acquire their consciousness of the structure and its conflicts with agency (Giddens 2001) on the terrain of ideology. This means that a people's consciousness is developed by the ideology disseminated in the structure in which they exist (Giddens 2001). This study argues that the ideology embedded in the school curriculum and expressed by educators through their pedagogical effort and hidden curriculum is partly the organizer of the pupils' actions or agency towards their gendered adult roles. This idea is aptly expressed in Gramsci's notion that organic ideologies are developed and spread in the historical bloc by intellectuals and a range of insti-

tutions and cultural organizations, including the church, schools and the media. While Althusser would argue that institutions such as the school and mass media are ideological state apparatus, Gramsci regards them as institutions for the spread of organic ideologies as an important part of hegemonic consensus (Christie 2008) to promote social order. It is apparent from the aforementioned that the concept of ideology is particularly useful in explaining relations of power, gender and domination in social institutions and in the explication of issues of inequality, injustices and oppression within the social structures of human existence. It is in this sense that the notion of ideology is used in this study.

In examining the notion of gender stratification in the curriculum of Zimbabwe as a patriarchal society the researchers drew on Gramsci's notion of commonsense, which he employs to discuss people's conceptions of their social world. Gramsci distinguished between philosophy and commonsense arguing that the latter refers to a pattern of common thinking in a particular time and place (Gramsci 1994). According to Gramsci every social structure has its own common sense and its own good sense, which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of man. Every philosophical current leaves behind sedimentation of common sense as the document of its historical effectiveness. It is this common sense as ideology in the curriculum that this study assumes predisposes girls and boys to particular subjects, careers or occupations. It is the common sense ideology embodied in the curriculum which this study posits is sometimes prejudicial to girls' schooling because of its gender biases, which manifest themselves through school curricular, both the overt and covert forms. The gender biases typical of the Zimbabwean school curricular thus invisibly shape human relationships, gender roles and behaviours and the overall life chances of males and females (Gordon 1995). In this sense, schools tend to empower boys more than they do to their girl counterparts. Such a view of the role of the schools as agents for the dissemination of the dominant ideology is also shared by Althusser (1971) who regards the school as having a dual role as an ideological state apparatus and as a repressive state apparatus, where the latter is summoned when the former fails to yield acceptable results.

In accounting for the development of self-concepts in children, founding fathers of the interactionist perspective, Mead, Thomas and Blumer reject the notion of biological determinism in the shaping of human behaviour and argue that meanings arise from the process of interaction rather than simply being present at the outset and shaping future action (Blackledge and Hunt 1985). By placing particular emphasis on the notion of the self, they suggest that individuals develop a self-concept, a picture of themselves, which has an important influence on their resultant actions. A self-concept develops from interaction processes, since it is in large part a reflection of the reactions of others most notably significant others, towards the individual. This explains why Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) coined the term looking glass self to denote the view that individuals tend to react in terms of their self-concepts as communicated to them by others especially their significant others (Mead 1934). Therefore the meanings that individuals come to perceive themselves in terms of are a social construct. Through role taking, individuals develop a concept of self and by placing themselves in the position of others they are able to emulate others and reflect upon themselves. For Mead the idea of self can only develop if the individuals can get outside himself or herself experientially in such a way as to become an object to himself (Mead 1934). To do this they must observe themselves from the standpoint of others, their looking glass self. Therefore the genesis and development of the concept of self lie in the ability to take the role of another. Mead thus distinguished between two aspects in the origin and development of the self, the 'me' and the 'I'. The former is one's definition of himself or herself in a specific social role while the latter implies one's opinion of himself or herself as a whole. It is the latter, which represents an individual's self-concept (Mead 1934). It is built up from the reactions of others to one's actions and the way one interprets those reactions. The 'I' can exercise a considerable influence over one's behaviour. For instance, an individual who perceives himself as cowardly on the basis of the self-concept he has built up will be unlikely to act bravely in dangerous situations. The self-concept is thus not inborn but a product of one's enculturation from childhood. It is developed as the child takes the role of a make-believe other (Ballantine and Spade 2004).

The development of a conscious self is an essential part of the process of becoming a socially acceptable human being. It provides the basis for thought and action as well as the foundation for human society since without an awareness of the self; the individual cannot direct actions or respond to the actions of others. By becoming self-conscious people can direct their own action through thought and deliberation. They can set goals for themselves, plan future actions, aspirations and consider the consequences of alternative courses of action.

Images of Men and Women in Pupils' Literature

The discussion is informed by the feminist view that there is a need to challenge the patriarchal nature of societies the world over (Gaidzanzwa 1997). As an action-oriented ideology which seeks to advocate equality of opportunities between males and females in society, feminism thus emphasizes the belief that women and men are equal and should be equally valued so as to have equal rights (Odaga and Heneveld 1995; Oshako 1995). As a movement it seeks to create an awareness of the fact that women are oppressed, devalued and dominated by men and that the structural arrangements that initiate, support, and legitimate that systematic oppression, constitute patriarchy. As an ideology, patriarchy is premised on the supremacy of males over women which enables the former to dominate the latter (Hartmann 2002). The discussion in this section also employs a content and discourse analysis of the text books analyzed for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was also observed from a couple of text books used in Zimbabwean schools that these generally tend to portray men in superior positions to those of their women counterparts and this subtly or directly influence girls' and boys' educational and career aspirations. For instance, by portraying women always at the kitchen sink, the books give the impression that not many women engage in paid work outside the home. What follows is a discussion of participants' responses to questions posed during the focus group interviews.

Twenty-four (80%) of the thirty student participants concurred that the patriarchal values embedded in the school curriculum are propagated through the school's hidden curriculum. Their responses and the factors they cited showed the hidden curriculum has an influence in entrenching gender and or patriarchal ideologies in the school. They cited such factors as the gender typing of school subjects and occupations as prevalent practices that buttress patriarchal values. According to the interviewed girls, boys often dominate numerically in those subjects traditionally stereotyped as masculine especially in the Natural Sciences and Mathematics. On the other hand, girls often dominate numerically in subjects associated with domesticity particularly in Food and nutrition, Fashion and fabrics and the Arts. Some of the participants pointed to sexual harassment as one of the issues buttressing the patriarchal ideology as apparent in the following statement by one girl interviewee:

One would expect lady teachers as our mothers and or older sisters to understand our predicament at the hands of boys and male teachers who harass us but to our disappointment they seem to share the same ideological sentiments as their male counterparts that as girls we are to blame for the sexual harassment that befalls us.

Probed to elaborate how the issue of sexual harassment occurs in the school 16 out of 30 (53.1%) girl participants alleged that it takes a number of forms and occurs at several levels within and outside of the school from verbal to the physical and involves not only the harassment by their school boy counterparts but also by young male teachers and senior members of staff as well some members in the upper echelons of school management. Eighteen (60%) girls cited sexual teasing, humiliation, verbal bullying and the unnecessary ridicule of girls by boys as some of the forms of abuse they endure at the hands of boys. For them, this leads to some of them suffering withdrawal symptoms. As a consequence, they often tend to underachieve academically. The following verbatim statement by one of the participants evidences the above view:

The boys will be watching you at break time. They will talk loudly and laugh, saying which Girl is beautiful and which is ugly. The boys can make you shy. They make comments

about your structure, about your body. Then you can just keep quiet in the classroom, not participating.

Twenty-four interviewees (80%) alleged that some teachers collude with boys to sexually harass them in the school, either subtly, by omission or directly. Asked what the teachers do when boys laugh at girls or ridicule them unnecessarily in the classroom, 25 out of the 30 girls (83.1%) interviewed concurred that more often than not their teachers laugh with the boys or just ignore the situation. Asked whether or not they report incidences of sexual harassment by boys or other staff members particularly to lady teachers, eighteen respondents (60%) indicated that reporting such cases to lady teachers would instead of helping the situation, do more harm than good to the victim as embodied in the following responses by one interviewee:

If you report it, you will be in big trouble. The teachers including female ones will say that you are a prostitute why were you seducing the boys or male teachers? In the end you will be to blame instead of receiving some sympathy. They will say a teacher would not propose love to you if you do not encourage him. May be he has rejected you that's why you are reporting him. If you are smarter or better fitted by clothes even your uniform than some of these lady teachers they accuse you of competing with them, making the whole case to crumble against you yet you are the victim. Sometimes the lady teachers may know about it but because they do not want trouble with their male workmates, they will tell you that they do not believe your story leaving you humiliated in the final analysis.

While some of the above statements made by girls were collaborated by statements made by some of the interviewed teachers, others denied it outright. Those who confirmed the girls' claims argued that such cases had occurred in the past and attributed them mainly to untrained or temporary teachers. Much of the blame for the sexual abuse of girls by male teachers was placed on the girls as the following response by one teacher points to:

Personally I think during that time (at forms 3 and 4) students are beginning to look more Beautiful and our boys do not hide their interest nor do male teachers. Some of them are really interested in these small girls, so sometimes the girls feel they can compete with the

lady teachers and this often ignites tension between girls and the lady teachers leading to accusations and counteraccusations. Girls sometimes want to attract boys and some male teachers by coming to school dressed to kill and as a result, some boys and young male teachers find their actions irresistible.

Seven teacher interviewees (70%) confirmed the above statements about sexual harassment of girls by their boy student counterparts in their schools. These teachers felt that it was proper for them to ignore such issues that they characterized as silly, immature or harmless and typical of boys and girls in schools the world over.

The Influence of Teacher Attitudes and Expectations

Generally the majority of teacher interviewees concurred that throughout their teaching they have always found the overall performance of girls not as good as that of their boy counterparts. Asked to explain what they attribute the discrepancy in performance to, six respondents (60%) cited the girls' acceptance of the feminine role ideology as primarily domestic and the belief that a man should be the provider and head of the family as the major causes of the performance discrepancy between girls and boys in education. Probed further, seven of the ten teachers interviewed (70%) revealed that not only were teachers disseminating these stereotypical views through their teaching, but also that in their personal and family lives they were enculturating their own children into these gendered ideological values and roles. Many of them claimed that they often saw it as their duty to prepare their pupils for 'appropriate' gender roles in the wider society as the following response from one teacher respondent shows:

I think it is part of my job as a teacher of Food and nutrition to prepare girls to be good wives. I prepare them in preparation for their gender role. Boys should learn Fashion and Fabrics so as bachelors they can look after themselves. After all, they will not have a wife immediately they leave school and they may be far from their mothers.

These findings revealed that the gender role ideologies, biases and stereotypes disseminated by teachers coupled with their (teacher) attitudes towards girl pupils as well as their beliefs about the nature of feminine emotions, abilities

and aptitudes do affect their expectations and subsequent treatment of girls in school. These findings confirm Meyer's (2008) assertion that teacher attitudes influence pupil expectations and their pedagogical practices. To a great extent the academic self-concepts of the girl participants in this study reflected the ways in which teachers depicted them. A study commissioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in 1992 entitled 'Shortchanging Girls' also concluded that the average school is biased against girls in a number of ways. The study found that girls did not receive as much attention from teachers as boys, and boys were called upon to answer more abstract and complex questions than girls. Instead, all too often, female high school students focused on their bodies and neglected their minds.

The acceptance of the feminine role as primarily domestic and the belief that the man should be the provider, breadwinner and head of the family was cited by 80 percent of the teachers interviewed. It became apparent from the responses given by these teachers that this belief is instrumental in the peddling of the patriarchal values and ideologies by these teachers.

At no time during the study did teachers indicate awareness that they or the school curriculum may in a way influence the educational achievement and career choices of the girls. Girls' academic achievement and career choices were attributed to the inadequacies of females in general, the girls themselves, their parents and home backgrounds and the culture of the broader society. Thus teachers in the main did not consider it their professional responsibility to initiate measures to help girls to overcome their limited agency (Giddens 2001) in terms of career choices. There was a minority of respondents, 2 teachers (10%) among the interviewees who recognized the need and felt they were doing all they could, to encourage and motivate girls but their actions appeared to be limited to telling their girl pupils that they should aspire to do as well as their boy counterparts in both education and career aspirations.

Among the cultural factors cited by the teacher respondents in this study as influencing girls' education and career aspirations was parents' influence on girls' attitudes and beliefs towards gender roles. According to the interviewed teachers, parents in many patriarchal societies regard the primary role of girls or wom-

en as domestic. The belief that men should be the heads of families and the bread winners appeared to influence the career prospects of girls interviewed and this contributed significantly to some of the lower achievement motivation in both their educational and career aspirations. These findings are consistent with the literature by Baly (1989), Osgood et al. (2006) and Brown (2002) who pointed out that parents do not only wield a lot of influence over their children's work experience, but also that strong respect, obedience, and desire to conform to one's parents and family traditions often deter children from families or social groups that uphold collective social values from pursuing careers that they have been brought up to accept as appropriate for the other sex. Such an idea entrenches patriarchy in society.

The girls' perceptions of feminine and masculine gender roles within the family and world of work, and their beliefs and values about the hierarchy of power and authority in the family and the public sphere correspond, in the main, with those of their teachers. The following statements represent the views of 28 out of 30 (93.1%) girl participants in this study on the question of gender roles in the family and the wider public sphere.

It is my responsibility as the wife to take care of the home and children while my husband provides for the economic needs of our family. As his wife I should do jobs in the home such as cooking, ironing and looking after our children. A husband should be more educated than his wife in order for him to earn more money.

Such responses were typical of many girls' responses and this showed that most girls and some teachers perceive the role of women in the family as primarily domestic, caring for the physical and emotional needs of their husbands and children. Whilst 16 out of 30 girls (53.8%) believe or hope that their husbands will help them with some of the domestic chores, 14 of them (46.2%) agreed that it is the wife's responsibility to take care of the home and children and all the domestic chores while husbands' main responsibilities should centre mainly on feeding for the family since they are the heads and bread winners of families. Responding to the question of cultural factors that affect girls' career aspirations 12 teacher respondents (60%) argued that in general girls' ideas of what it means to be a

wife and mother closely correspond with those of their parents. As a result many of them often wish to follow careers that will not cause role conflicts and upset the social structure in which they exist. The sexual divisions of labour which most girls would anticipate to exist in their marriages often reflect that which they witness in their communities and homes between their parents and which they experience more directly through the sexual division of labour imposed upon them by their significant others such as teachers and parents. These findings are consistent with those cited by Francis (2002) where participants expressed similar traditional views that indicate some girls were prepared to work until they marry and thereafter, expected to cease paid work in order to become fulltime house wives and mothers or to assume the role of secondary breadwinners. The results of studies such as the current one should be seen within the broader context of the gender role socialization of the home and society, which generally emphasize the parenting role of women and encourage girls to make career sacrifices for their families (Jozefowicz et al. 1993).

Gender Role Socialization and its Impact on Girls' Career Choices

The fact that many of the teacher interviewees (60%) subscribed to gender-stereotyped perceptions of men-only and women-only tasks in the home environment may be a reflection of the resilience of socializing agents in perpetuating gender role stereotypes acquired through years of socialization from early childhood, especially because gender role socialization takes place in children as early as preschool age (Shaw 1998). Even if career guides and counselors or occupational psychologists may try to deconstruct these gender role stereotypes, their effort may not be adequate to undo the effects of years of social conditioning, particularly in a social context such as Zimbabwe where collective social values are still prevalent. According to the interviewed teachers socializing agents, in particular parents and siblings not only condition children to gender-type certain activities as for boys or girls but also most likely influence the future career aspirations of the children. These interviewees also cited the influence of gender socialization, which occurs in the home as girls learn from their parents and siblings by

observing their parents and older siblings as important role models (Bandura 1975). For some of the teachers interviewed, it is the gender role stereotypes acquired early in the girls' life that may obscure their openness to new roles or possibilities of new career horizons when presented by their teachers or occupational psychologists. This means that for some girls gender role development is a product of the direct and conscious efforts of parents in their quest to train their daughters in what they deem appropriate gender roles as a preparation for adult roles. The interviewed teachers also indicated that the girls' home environments often present important implications for career choices for girls who may be exposed to differential reinforcements that socialize them to accept the so-called gender appropriate careers early in their life. These results are consistent with the literature by Miller and Budd (1999) as well as that reported by Lightbody and Durnell (1996) who noted that gender-stereotyped beliefs, such as those expressed above by the teacher respondents are still rife in many societies, and often exert a strong impact on children's future occupational aspirations.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that a whole range of curriculum selection seems to favour the interests of boys or men at the expense of girls or women (patriarchy) in society. Although presented as unbiased, the interpretations and or portrayals of males and females in the curriculum provide a justification for patriarchal tendencies in the school curriculum because the ideological support for boys and men as a powerful social group dominates curricular material especially school textbooks. Situations such as the apparent lack of women in leadership positions do not create a positive image for girls. For example, a female teacher with a male principal sends a powerful message to girls about their leadership capabilities and their position in society. In the three schools chosen for the study all the principals were men. Despite many qualified female teachers in the school, females appeared to be overlooked for leadership positions. Parents and teachers tend to treat their female and male children differently not only as they enter school but as soon as they enter the world. This is reflected in several ways: the way they hold and

plan with their children and influence their aspirations, the activities their children are exposed to boys or girls and even the type of encouragement children receive when trying new activities. The study also concludes that it is imperative to spotlight the cost of gender equity to society and to change the pedagogical strategies used in most schools in the country. Educators must take the responsibility to expand and enhance commitments to gender equity. Presently, the need for qualified scientists and engineers cannot be met. Therefore, the norm in the school curriculum and pedagogy must include enticing female students to pursue the sciences. To understand the position of girls and women in education requires an understanding of changing structures and complex processes and a commitment to breaking down the barriers which continue to result in female disadvantage. If Zimbabwe is to hold the best possible future for our people and civilization, she cannot afford to waste a primary resource—our nation's girls and women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended that to achieve equity in education schools require more than gender-balanced textbooks and gender-fair teaching practices. The school curricula need to be transformed to include the contributions, experiences, and scholarship of women. Although considerable time is needed for significant change to occur in educational practices, and the need for systematic support for effective implementation, the authors of this paper believe that teachers and educational leaders do have the ability to create transformative classrooms. If teacher education programmes are to contribute to the deconstruction of the gender polarization of aspirations social roles, students in teacher education programmes need to receive gender equity training and instruction in gender-balanced pedagogies. Teachers need to learn how to identify gender equity in instructional materials as well as learn about specific scholarship and contributions made by women in their content areas. Teachers who receive this training may become important change agents once they arrive in the classroom. To achieve equity educators should begin the process early in the lives of girls. Guidance and counselors as well as vocational educators need

to provide career information to girls when they are in elementary school. Self-perception of ability in mathematics, science, and technology has been found to be a high predictor of course selection and of choosing these areas as major fields of study and therefore educators should encourage all students to explore their potential to the fullest regardless of gender. The relationship between self-esteem and success in these fields appears to be circular. Girls need female role models as mentors and opportunities to interact with women in the community who work in technical and non-traditional fields. It must no longer be acceptable to parents or guidance and counselors for students to opt out of difficult science or mathematics classes. Teachers must encourage girls as much as boys to pursue rigorous courses. Parents can increase science achievement by providing their daughters with science-related experiments at home, toys that are mechanical in nature, and science-related excursions. It is also recommended that educators also help parents (for example, during open days) to become aware of the positive and negative impacts of gender role socialization on the children's educational and occupational aspirations so that they try and empower both their sons and daughters through provision of support strategies to deconstruct gender biases and the polarization of aspirations along gender lines.

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