Hegemonic Masculinity as a Pedagogical Challenge in the School Curriculum: The Zimbabwean Example

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Abstract: *This study explored how patriarchal ideology in Zimbabwe disguises as common sense in the school curriculum leading pupils towards a gender polarised consciousness. Focus group and individual interviews and classroom observations were used for data collection. The findings revealed the ways in which the patriarchal hegemony that is promoted through the curriculum reflected taken for granted masculine and feminine roles and existential attitudes, beliefs and values within society. Through their interactions with teachers, girls were oriented towards developing the type of consciousness, personal demeanour, modes of self-presentation, self-image and the gender identifications which predisposed them to specific social roles and competencies. The conclusion is that the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean school curriculum advantages boys through institutionalised and ingrained gender role beliefs and ritualised behaviours valued by the society.*

Key words: Patriarchy, gender, roles, Zimbabwe

Introduction

According to Carr (2009) society, school and the curriculum are mutually constitutive. They co-define what is taught and regulate teaching and learning. Walker (2010) too, views, for example, the school as a social institution that functions through an ensemble of mechanisms to promote the gender relations typical of the society in which such an ensemble exists. It ((ensemble) is often reflected in the architecture, organisational structure, chain of command or hierarchical set up, the nature of the curriculum and pedagogy, the treatment of pupils as boys and girls in the classrooms and the individualised work cards and wall charts displayed in the classrooms. Apter and Garnsey (2004) argue that among these factors are gender role stereotypes, sexist ideologies, prejudices and biased gender role values by educators and learners that contribute to the development of masculinity and a patriarchal ideology disguised as common sense. Thus, by focusing on these aspects one should be able to reveal what Gramsci (1971) argues is the common sense or natural order of things within schools and classrooms depending on the extent to which they are experienced by the pupils (see also Boggs). Therefore, given Gramsci's (1971) distinction between the traditional intelligentsia, who see themselves as a class apart from society, and the thinking groups which every class produces from its own ranks organically, even though teachers think of themselves as independent of ruling groups, this can be construed as an illusion because they may uphold conservative hegemonic masculinities, roles and ideologies aligned to and assisting the ruling group in society. In their role as inorganic intellectuals they often subconsciously support the dominant gender ideology in society. It is in this sense that teachers, wittingly or unwittingly contribute to what Heywood (2004) describes as the social construction of masculinity and femininity between boys and girls in schools as social structures.

It is in this sense that schooling may play an important part in the social system by socialising girls and boys into what society considers as the gender appropriate roles. For example, Mutekwe & Modiba, (2012a) have argued that schools in Zimbabwe exert a significant influence on the patriarchy promoted through encouragement of boys and girls to pursue various curricular activities including choices of subjects to study. This influence is conflated with Zimbabwean culture. As a result, the nexus or intersection of the school, culture and patriarchy is so strong that it is taken as common sense. Gordon (1995) and Meena (2004) have argued that such patriarchy serves to sustain the dominant social position of men while subordinating women.

In this study patriarchy is thus viewed as an ideology that sustains the dominant social position of men and a subordinate one for women. The quest to examine how it is practised in schools and classrooms as key sites for the development of feminine and masculine beliefs and dispositions, thus necessitated paying close attention to everyday classroom practices, such as teacher talk, peer group culture, curricular material and the general schools' message systems to identify in both the formal and hidden curricula, the gender biases, attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices and the gender discourses embodied in the curriculum as well as the role of schools as social contexts in the process of gender identity formation through explicit and other subtler social phenomena typical of school practices that, amongst others, Francis and Skelton (2001) and Connell (2002) view as important influences in this regard.

Methodology

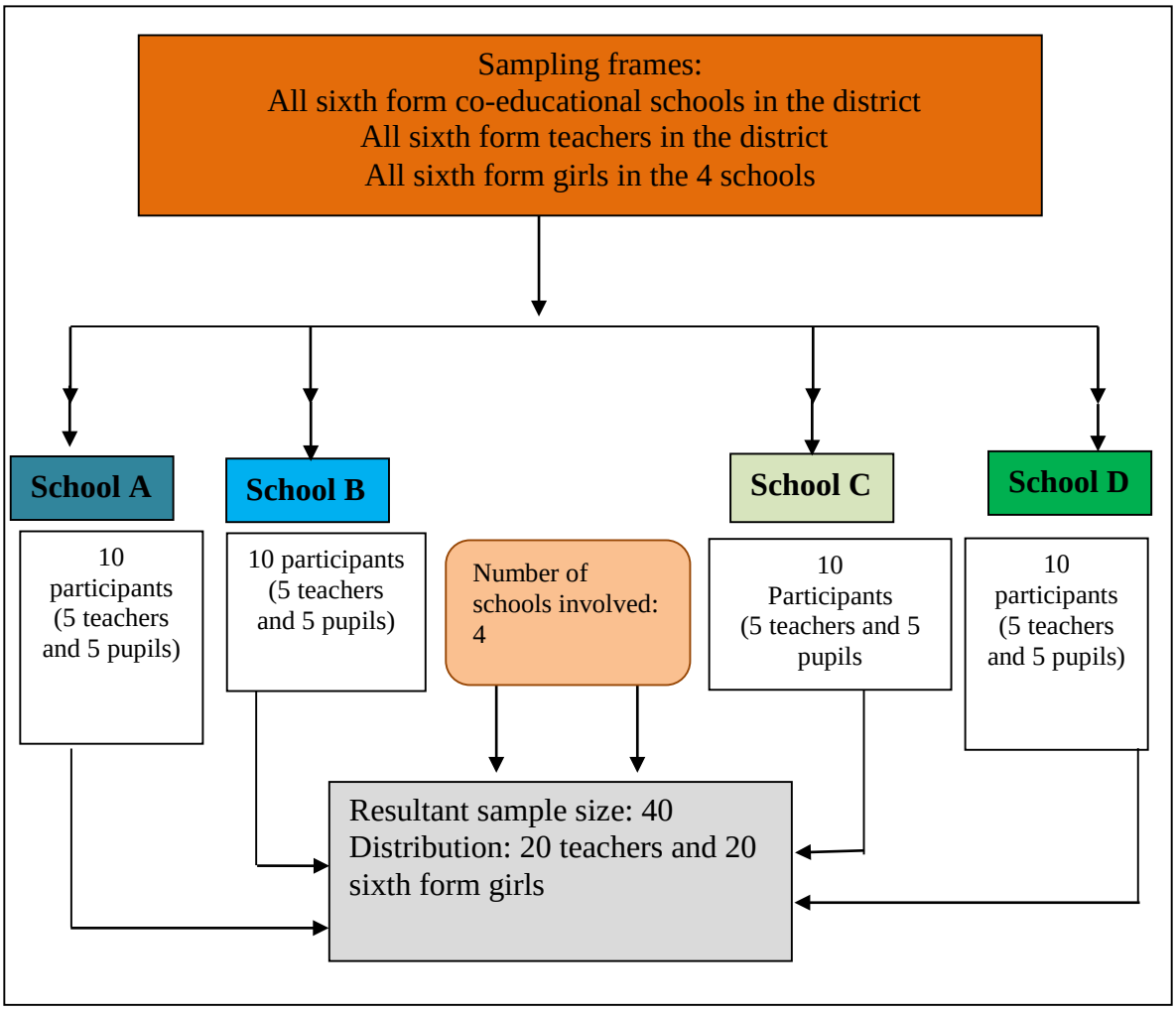
We adopted a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach (herein abbreviated as IPA) (Heidegger, 2002; Merleau-Ponty, 1974; Smith & Osborn, 2008) to study interactions between the teachers and the girls they taught so as to gain an understanding of the gender role identities and subjective realities (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Howe, 2003) that were enacted during lessons and generally, in the schools. These were reflected as lived experiences in the language used and the beliefs, attitudes and values that were expressed. Walum (2008), for example, considers language usage (discourses) as the chief vehicle that makes social interaction possible by providing an ideal illustration of the cultural transmission process. For him, language forms or discourses contain many explicit messages regarding cultural definitions.

Population and sampling

A purposive and systematic sample of 40 participants was used, comprising 20 teachers and 20 high school girls drawn from 4 schools in a district well placed to provide insights from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Since the district is in one of the industrialised provinces of Zimbabwe, it provided a cross-section of social classes. Out of a total population of 80 sixth-form teachers in the district, 36 were female, 44 male. This translated into an average gender ratio of 9 to 11, implying that for every nine female teachers in each school there were 11 male teachers. Therefore, to obtain a gender balanced and manageable sample the gender cohort was assigned a code, 1 to 36 and 1 to 44 (cf. Figure 1). The next stage involved systematically selecting from the two sampling cohorts in the ratio of 9 to 11. As a result, a representative and proportionally gender-balanced sample of 20 teachers (9 females to 11 males) was identified for the study. A similar sampling procedure was adopted in identifying the sixth-form girls. It involved first rearranging alphabetically the names of all the 160 girls in the four schools into a sampling frame and then systematically counting in multiples of 8 to obtain a sample of 20. The resultant sample size for both the teachers and girls was therefore 40 distributed as 20 for each group. This made the sampling techniques purposive and systematic (cf. Mutekwe & Modiba, 2013; Nieuwenhuis, 2010;

Odimegwu, 2004). Figure 1 below graphically illustrates the overall sampling process adopted for the study.

Figure 1: Graphic illustration of the overall sampling processes adopted



Ethical Considerations

We sought and obtained permission to conduct this study from the district education directorate responsible for the schools in which the study was conducted. First, we sought ethical clearance from the district education officials representing the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture in Zimbabwe. We also sought and obtained the girls and teachers' informed consent before taking part in the study. To do this, the would-be participants (teachers and girls) were formally informed about the purpose of the study prior to conducting the focus group and individual interviews with them. They were also informed of their right to voluntary participation, privacy, informed consent, confidentiality and that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time without any penalty. None withdrew. Also prior to the interview sessions, participants were fully assured that the data gathered would be treated with strict confidentiality.

Data Collection

The multiple data collection strategies were crucial in encouraging flexibility and in triangulating the data. They facilitated the direct experience of the interactions between the

teachers and the girls as phenomena unfolding (Hesse-Biber, 2010) in the classrooms and schools as research setting. IPA (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008), allowed us to directly reach, hear, see, feel and interpret the experiences of the participants, thereby contributing though subjectively, to an understanding of their social construction of reality, which is a central focus of IPA studies (Smith & Osborn, 2008). First, classroom observations were conducted to capture the classroom discourses that were used during the lessons. By observing these (discourses) at the levels of action, representation and identification (Gee, 2000), we managed to capture the basic elements of the portrayal of gender and the patriarchal ideologies as embodied in the school curriculum. We followed up by conducting this by focus group interviews with 20 girls divided into 10 participants per group and individual interviews with the teachers to obtain their views on both the explicit and hidden forms of curricula as they experienced them during lessons and how they were manifested in the schools in general. With the focus group interviews we could moderate and direct the discussions towards the desired areas of the research's focus (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). The 20 girls were asked to divide themselves into 4 focus groups of 5 members and each of the groups was interviewed twice for an hour in a month to capture the general conceptions and perceptions of how masculinity manifests itself in the school curriculum. The interviews were initiated through what Odimegwu (2004) describes as the *funnel technique,* a procedure whereby semi-structured questions are used to first ease the participants into the discussion before delving into full throttle deliberations. To ensure that all the interviews were conducted without disrupting the school tone or lesson times, we identified days when both the teachers and pupils had no lessons or classes running. Each focus group discussion was scheduled on a different day. As for the teachers' individual interviews, these were conducted at different days as determined by their work schedules.

Data Management and Analysis

Guided by Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005), we looked for similarities and differences amongst the girls and teachers' views in order to produce patterns of meanings that underlay their shared experiences of school curricula. The analysis proceeded on a case-by-case basis as described by Smith and Osborn (2008). For example, every interview transcript was read several times to develop a general understanding then more closely to separate each text into meaning units. For each unit, a descriptive summary of the experiences the participants recounted was captured. This was followed by interpretative coding to identify salient themes before moving on to the next case. The themes were then synthesised to produce super-ordinate ones (themes). Reflexivity (Shaw, 2005) proved useful to make sense of experiences and ensure a detailed analysis that was flexible. It involved a six-fold thinking process of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and innovation with the data (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Each of these steps offered a different vantage point on the data as we moved through the different levels of interpretation. Also the participation of the 20 girls and teachers proved ideal (Mutekwe & Modiba 2012b) as their views could be easily categorised. The six-fold stages of data analysis as adapted from Smith et al. (2009) are indicated in table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of the six IPA stages adopted for data analysis

Steps	Procedures	Key processes in the IPA analysis
1	Reading the raw data	In this initial stage we had to immerse ourselves in the raw data by reading and re-reading the interview scripts. The key idea was to slow down the temptation for quick and easy reduction and synopsis. In doing so, we had to bracket (or delay) our initial instinctive observations and reflections.

2	Initial noting of salient features in the transcripts	At this stage of data analysis we had to embark on a more detailed examination of the semantic content and language while retaining an open mind and noting areas of interest in the transcripts. This implied making a descriptive core of comments and interpretive notes (akin to phenomenological roots that are close to the participants' explicit meanings). Essentially this meant analysing data at three levels: descriptive comments; understanding phrases, key words and explanations as presented by the participants; linguistic comments: reflections on the discourse used by the participants and conceptual comments that interrogate the data to unpack the underlying meanings behind the texts at an abstract and implicit level.
3	Developing themes	The process involved re-examining the emerging themes in order to reduce the volume of data (scripts and notes), whilst maintaining the key ideas or issues. This allowed for the mapping of the interrelationships, connections and patterns between the themes. In this process initial notes were analysed and grouped into emergent themes reflecting both the description of the participants and our interpretations (double hermeneutics).
4	Searching for connections across/among emerging themes	At this stage the emerging themes were re-structured to highlight the most interesting and salient features in the participants' accounts. The groups herein called superordinate themes were all overarching or inclusive in terms of the salient and relevant features characteristic of the participants' accounts. It is at this stage that some of the themes were excluded based on their impertinence to the research questions.
5	Moving to the next case	In keeping with the idiographic commitment and phenomenological principles of IPA, we had to bracket the knowledge acquired in other analytical processes outlined above so as to look for fresh insights in the data.
6	Coming up with superordinate themes	In this final stage of IPA we looked for superordinate themes which recurred across cases. In practice, this required that we placed tables side-by-side to compare them. Similarities were grouped using highlighter pens. A table of themes was finally produced for the groups to show how the key issues nested within superordinate themes that eventually formed the basis of the discussion for this study.

Further to the above processes, we also paid specific attention to classroom and other discourses to unmask aspects of the curriculum that polarised boys' and girls' attitudes, academic interests and ambitions. Some of the evidence from the participants' views is presented in the form of verbatim statements to enhance trustworthiness (Richardson, 2000).

Results and Discussion

The following themes formed the basis of the discussion of findings: The stay-at-home-mum-mentality, views towards marriage and patriarchy, conformity to social conventions, classroom discourse and patriarchy and teachers' suggestions for mitigating patriarchal hegemony in the school curriculum.

The Stay-At-Home-Mum-Mentality

The views obtained in this study vindicate Meyer's (2008) assertion that in many African societies girls are most often parentified (made parents) to help their mothers with looking after their siblings. They also lent credence to Gottfredson's (2002) theory that by adolescence, the girls' ambitions or aspirations have already been narrowed down to those that are considered gender-appropriate. Their sense of the options available to them becomes circumscribed over time. Responding to the question of what types of jobs they wish to pursue upon completion of schooling, 13 out of the 20 girls (65%) argued in favour of careers

typically linked to the stay-at-home-mum-mentality, indicating that when they marry they would prefer jobs that would allow them to stay closer to their families. They disapproved of women who pursued careers that interfered with childrearing. The girls considered it their role as wives to raise their daughters to become good future mothers and caretakers of the home. Here is an example of a response that was provided during the focus group interviews:

Locadia: *It is also part of my duty as a wife to train my daughters and sons to be able to observe their roles as girls and boys. For daughters, it is every mother's wish to see her daughter getting married and living a decent life with her husband and children. For boys, mothers should instil a sense of responsibility in fending for the family since they will be the heads of families and bread winners. Teaching about all these roles should be my role as a woman or mother of the children.*

Although many girls in the focus groups aspired to go to university after completing their high school education, they held strong beliefs and attitudes (ideology) about their future lives as wives, mothers and child-minders. A significant number thought that their parents had good marriages. 17 out of the 20 in the sample (85%) aspired to marry one day, especially after completion of their vocational studies. A notable idea in the girls' responses during the focus group interviews was their wish not to rush into marriage before completing their high school education. They indicated that they feared that it might be very difficult to find men willing to marry them if they were to put economic ambitions (first) before marriage since many men do not usually wish to marry women who have excelled on the economic front, for fear of economic challenges in the home. This was an interesting revelation on their part and not unique to Zimbabwean girls. It happened in North America in the post-war era when women started to pursue college degrees and careers because they no longer saw their self-realization as simply related to becoming wives and mothers (see for example, Merna 2004; Smith, 1990; Spivak 1998). In Canada, the first wave of feminism occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to increase the women's role in public life, including women's suffrage, increased property rights and access to education and recognition as persons under the law (Merna, 2004). This early iteration of Canadian feminism was largely based in maternal feminism, the idea that women are natural caregivers and mothers of the nation who should participate in public life because of their perceived propensity for decisions that will result in good care of society (Merna, 2004). They were seen as a civilizing force on society - a significant part of women's engagement in missionary work and in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).

Views towards marriage and patriarchy

The patriarchal nature of most families in Zimbabwean society was reflected in the girls' desire to have their would-be husbands assuming the roles of family breadwinner and head of family, and to be responsible for the financial support of their wives and children. The girls believed that their role as women was to be the caretakers, responsible for looking after their husbands, children and the home. The following excerpt reflected their views:

Melody: *More often than not, when you have done well for yourself in terms of education and career, men feel challenged economically, especially if you earn more than them. This explains why many men prefer to marry women less educated and economically empowered than them. They do this so that they remain the breadwinners and controllers of the family's economic muscle.*

Chipo: *As a woman, I must make sure that the job I do allows me to be able to look after my husband and children. A decent woman should be able to wash, clean and look after her*

children and husband, otherwise the husband will send you packing and you will become a disgrace to your family.

Loice: *Children certainly need a mother to teach them many things before they go to school. While my husband would be the head of the family as a whole, I would wish to be his assistant who would ensure that children are assisted to clean their clothes, cook for them and do their homework.*

When asked whether they wished to continue learning to improve themselves in their later life, only 8 of the 20 girls in the sample (40%) indicated willingness for lifelong learning. The 12 girls who answered in the negative (60%) argued that owing to the patriarchal nature of their society that does not seem to appreciate continuous learning by women whom they expect to prioritise bearing and raising children, they would not bother themselves provided they have bread winner husbands. The excerpts below point to the influence of the limiting social role expectations:

Mandy: *What I have noticed in my society is that if you are a woman who is ambitious and wish to continue upgrading yourself, most men discourage you because they expect you to be under them, bearing and raising children.*

Miriam: *In some cases men want to suppress women's ambitions, partly because they feel challenged by ambitious women or they want to remain economically dominant in the families.*

The above views clarify how the society was instrumental in promoting hegemonic masculinity, which Gramsci (1971) argues is largely responsible for the disadvantages that girls and women often encounter in patriarchal societies. This seemed to inform the girls' understanding and awareness of their selfhood. Drawing on his views, this understanding could thus be explained in terms of how the prevalent patriarchal ideology engendered role consciousness through experiences in families the implications of which were transferred into schools. Similar sentiments are shared by Nhundu (2007), who contends that in Zimbabwe the gender ideology embodied in the school curriculum leaves girls generally more disadvantaged than boys. In the Bourdieuan (2008) sense, the social fields were such that boys enjoyed better access to the benefits of education than the girls who tended to face systematic structural constraints because of the patriarchal ideology within society. The following are excerpts of the girls' responses and comments about the influence of this ideology on their teachers' attitudes and expectations towards them:

Epephania*: Teachers think boys are more intelligent than us girls. As a result, in most group tasks they assign them the roles of group leaders while most of us girls are expected to work under them. Some teachers tell us that even when we get married we must accept and subordinate ourselves to our husbands because they will always be our providers and heads of families.*

Juliet*: Sometimes you hear teachers passing comments like 'you boys surprise me', and 'how do you expect to look after your wife and children if you are not working hard at school?' 'Do not forget that we expect you to be able to support your families after schooling when you are working.' 'If you do not work hard and you fail, chances are that if you marry an educated working wife you will be under petticoat government'.*

These findings provide confirmation of what Baly (2009), Osgood et al., (2006) and Brown (2002) identified as the great influence adults wield over their children's ambitions in their social structures. As Velmans and Sneider (2010) also argued, such influence has to be understood as subjective and as reflecting a form of self-efficacy that reinforces what is generally in the feminine domain (. Ginsberg,1974). The girls seemed to have internalised this efficacy developed as a result of the social structural influences and conformity to social conventions as illustrated below.

Conformity to social conventions

The need to conform to social conventions reinforced the girls' views on traditional gender roles. Conformity was promoted by the taunting or teasing suffered by those who did not fit into the roles to which others in the peer group subscribed. They experienced exclusion from peer group activities and peers reacted more positively to girls who fitted traditional gender roles. For example, one of the focus groups reported the case of a 17 year-old netballer whose favourite colour was blue and, as a result, when the netball coach was buying sports uniforms the girl chose blue. Her parents had no objection, although the salesman told her girls' uniforms should be pink. When the decision was made to buy blue the girl began to endure abuse, not only from the boys but also by her girl teammates and women in the neighbourhood. Soon afterwards, all the girls protested and stopped wearing the blue netball uniform, demanding that the school procure a new uniform with colours considered in the interests of the majority of the girls. The following excerpts reflect peer pressure:

Naume: *One netball girl wanted to hoodwink us into putting on a blue sports uniform, claiming that she did not like girls' colours such as pink. In fact, she managed to have a blue uniform bought for us due to her influence but when we boycotted wearing it she could not bear the pressure and ended up giving in, thereby conforming to our demand that she acted in accordance with female colours which our society is comfortable with.*

Mavis: *There are some girls in this school who try to act like boys by wanting to compete with them but we tell them that they must not forget that they will one day be pregnant and not as strong as boys or men so they need not waste their effort and instead accept the fact that God created males and females differently so that they can fulfil different roles.*

Nokhuthula: *If we realise that a girl wants to move away from social convention and act like a boy; we have our own way of making her conform to gender role expectations. For example, we exert enormous pressure on her until she gives in as we did with the netball captain mentioned by Naume earlier on.*

The above excerpts (pseudonymously transcribed) show how the girl's attempt at deviation from social convention was sanctioned to impose compliance with what was widely held by the society. As Gramsci (1994) argued ideas expressed seemed natural or common-sensical because of taken for granted as normal within society. In addition, the classroom observations virtually in all the four schools chosen as the sites for the study, the forms of language (discourses) used by the teachers and pupils during school and classroom interactions reflected various forms of gender biases, stereotyped attitudes and prejudices. Teachers tended to allocate chores to girls and boys in ways that differentiated social roles along gender lines, with girls often getting less challenging chores associated with domesticity while boys were often asked to execute more challenging chores associated with life in the public sphere. The excerpts below reflect the teachers' perceptions of appropriate gender roles for their pupils as boys and girls:

Mr. Vhutuza: *As a Building teacher, I ensure that during practicals girls do not climb onto scaffolds but rather help the boys by carrying bricks, bringing them to the building sites from ovens.*

Mrs Gunere*: During extra-curricular activities in the school I make it a point that girls are engaged in light duties such as sweeping the school yard, classrooms and packing books in the library or storerooms. As for boys, we try as much as possible to instil in them the view that they will be the breadwinners and heads of families and therefore they should undertake most of the challenging menial tasks right from school to the world of work.*

The notion of assigning light duties to girls as opposed to boys is a traditional gender role ideology in many patriarchal societies (Nhundu, 2007). This view is also implicitly evident in the girls' responses as captured in the excerpt below.

Molly: *Many of their comments about us appear to be centred on our role of motherhood. Even when they are supposed to be giving us equal treatment, sometimes one hears comments that relegate us to the roles of housekeepers and childbearing machines.*

Drawing from the views of, amongst others, Butler (2000), Meena (2004) and Machingura (2006), the views expressed here support a view most notably expressed in Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble* where she critiques the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan. She rejects the use of the term postmodernism on the grounds that it is too vague to be meaningful and criticises the distinction drawn by previous feminisms between (biological) sex and (socially constructed) gender. Her argument is that it insufficiently addresses concerns related to essentialism. Though recognizing gender as a social construct, she argues that post- modern feminists assume it is always constructed in the same way and feels that women's subordination has no single cause or single solution. It is because of this that it has often been criticised for offering no clear path to action.

The girls' argument that language was the main tool used by their teachers to foster domination and subordination between male and female pupils in the schools reflects a view that has been also well expressed by Frug (2002). In her view power is exercised not only through direct coercion, but also through the way in which language shapes and restricts the reality of males and females in society. However, since it (language) is always open to re-interpretation, it can also be used to resist this shaping and restriction and so serves as a potential fruitful site of political struggle (Frug, 2002). In Frug's view sex is not something natural nor completely determinate and definable. Rather, it is part of a system of meaning, produced by language. Therefore, cultural mechanisms encode the female body with meanings and explain these meanings by an appeal to the natural differences between the sexes and differences that the rules themselves help to produce. According to Frug, rejecting the idea of a natural basis to sexual difference allows us to see that it is always susceptible to new interpretations. Like other systems of meaning, sex is less like a cage, and more like a tool. It constrains but never completely determines what one can do with it. It is in this sense that Machingura (2006) and Mutekwe (2008) are concerned about the gender biased and stereotypical views of teachers that are responsible for the fate of girls' academic underachievement and limited ambitions when compared with their boy counterparts. Also the evidence presented herein demonstrates that in the four schools the girls were made aware of expectations of their social role. It seemed as if teachers deliberately passed on cultural definitions to pupils as boys and girls. A significant number encouraged more boys than girls to be ambitious in their life. This view is discussed in greater detail below.

Classroom discourse and patriarchy

Fourteen teachers (70%) argued that acting in *loco parentis* they regarded the role of girls as primarily domestic, consequently considering their husbands to be the heads of families and bread winners. This mind-set and what they attributed to the girls' academic achievement and ambitions, compared to those of the boys was also expressed by 18 of them (90%). They did not consider it their professional responsibility to initiate measures to help the girls overcome their limited ambitions. Only two (10%) recognised the need and felt they were doing their best to encourage and motivate them to be as equally ambitious as the boys. However, their efforts appeared to be confined to simply telling the girls that they should be equally ambitious as boys:

Mr. Gwebu: *We try as much as possible to tell the girls not to be intimidated by the boys in their various subjects. Last week I had a session with my class in which I told the girls to strive to compete equally with the boys in all their school activities.*

Asked to explain how he encouraged the girls to do this, another teacher responded:

Mr. Gwebu: *We make it clear to them that what boys can do; the girls can also do provided they have the zeal to work as hard as the boys. We tell them that because generally these girls do not work as hard as their boy counterparts.*

Similar sentiments are implicit in the following excerpts of the teachers' responses:

Mr Benza: *As a Mathematics teacher, I try by all means to encourage my pupils to dispel the myth that boys are better at Mathematics than girls but unfortunately I do not seem to get enough support from my colleagues.*

Mrs Mpezeni: *Despite my efforts to instil a sense of gender equality in subject choices at the beginning of their Advanced School Certificate level, girls never cease to amaze me for the rate at which they continue to opt for subjects that have always been considered as women's.*

Mr Mthombeni: *For me girls must be taught how to behave in ways that will remind them of their role expectations as girls or future wives and child-rearers. I do not allow any girls from my class to want to behave like boys. When we finish class, I ask them to clean the class and arrange books on the shelves. As for boys, I ensure that they help me with replacing the chairs and desks that we will have moved during our science experiments. This is the only way we can create order in our classes. Division of labour has always been along gender lines ever since the time of creation. So trying to change that is tantamount to trying to defy the law of nature.*

These teachers' views could be understood as serving consciously or not what Heyhood (2003) regards as hegemonic masculinity, that is, a practice of perpetuating gender inequality in favour of men. Although they indicated that they treated boys and girls equally, and that for them the pupils' gender identities were not very important, their views still reflected a partiality in favour of the boys that tended to foster a sense of self- marginalisation or lack of commitment among the girls. The views tended to propagate the inadequacy of the girls. Their perceived restricted commitment was linked directly to the role expectations of motherhood and what they perceived as girls' aspirations or ambitions. Also apparent in the individual views were patriarchal values, ideas and attitudes that tended to blur the distinction between sex and gender. Teachers assumed that all socio-economic distinctions between men and women were rooted in social role expectations. In an endeavour to establish the

participants' views on ways to mitigate the effects of these views we enquired from the teachers and the girls what they regarded as best practices. In their responses, many teachers expressed the need for their schools to understand the girls' lived experiences of school culture. They argued that it is only when they have a clear picture of what happened to boys and girls within the school walls that they can be able to institute effective programmes, such as career guidance and counselling sessions aimed at promoting effective gender sensitivity. They also indicated that all curricular materials, including text books and other learning tools, need to be thoroughly examined to eliminate the gender-biased ideologies, stereotypes and prejudices embodied therein. While teachers looked mainly to curriculum designers to balance the curriculum along gender lines, the girls' perspectives were that the school curriculum should be more gender-neutral and conducive to equal competition across genders. The prevalent attitudes and beliefs affected them negatively and often led to a low self-esteem and achievement motivation. They suggested that the allocation of school subjects needs to be conducted in a fair, transparent and gender-neutral manner if it is to afford them an equal and fair competition of curriculum choice.

Suggestions for mitigating patriarchal hegemony in the school curriculum

The following excerpts reflect the views of the teachers and their pupils on ways of alleviating the influence of the patriarchal ideology in the school curriculum:

Teachers:

Mrs Gunzvenzve: *Curriculum designers and authors are the ones who need to look into the issue of gender equality in the material or literature for pupils in schools. As teachers our duty is to implement a prepared curriculum using what they will have designed for us. By this I am not saying we cannot influence changes in support of gender equity but this process must start with curriculum designers doing a fair job. Parents also need to play ball in this process.*

Mrs. Salimu*: Some teachers in this school need to understand that being born a girl or woman does not disempower us. We need to be accorded an equal and fair treatment in all human rights affairs. Yesterday I witnessed verbal abuse of girls by two male teachers who labelled the girls as destined for mere motherhood. This was after they failed the Mathematics test.*

Mrs. Nduna: *As teachers we need to ensure that all our pupils are given equal treatment in the schools. Some of us teachers are guilty of sexism and various forms gender biases in favour of boys. I wish we could all be impartial in our interactions with pupils. I try to promote equality of the sexes in my classes and I feel if all of us could do that.*

Arguments such as the ones above indicate that social structures and the boundaries imposed through the hidden curriculum tend to make girls suffer what Merleau-Ponty (1974) would describe as experiences transcending sense or reason, to include nonsense or lack of reason. His assertion that meanings begin with perception can thus be employed here to argue that, as human beings, the girls received unfair treatment because they were situated within a social environment in which they were perceived as *being-in-a-world* characterised by socio-cultural limits. For him, as for Giddens (2001), this implies that the importance of the agency by which the girls ought to act against their constraining environment (social structure) to change their circumstances is thwarted. It is thus reasonable to conclude that the girls' self-perceptions developed through experiences of school culture and feedback from significant others in their social environments were often predestined to lead many of them along

trajectories that privileged patriarchy. The teachers' actions, attitudes and expectations towards the girls' social roles were largely responsible for their fate. They exacerbated their aspirations through pedagogic practices and general interaction patterns with pupils as girls and boys in the school and classrooms. The following views reflect the girls' unhappiness with experiences of school cultural practices. The sentiments expressed reflect concerns about what the girls viewed as the teachers' behaviour that sustained attitudes phenomena that promoted domination and subordination between males and females within their schools.

Mildred: *Teachers must avoid unfair treatment of us pupils because of our sex differences. Some male teachers think that our role as girls is mere reproduction of children.*

Moudy: *They must not think that girls cannot do well in certain subjects because this makes them to exclude some from important subjects. It also limits us from competing with the boys because of the differences in the subjects we will be studying.*

As inorganic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971), educators (parents and teachers) wittingly or not fostered hegemonic masculinities in their children. They operated as practically-minded directors and organisers to engender and perpetuate a patriarchal ideology and hegemony through the ways in which they interact with children as girls and boys. The use of a prevalent ideology to articulate, through classroom discourses the language of a taken for granted culture and the feelings and experiences which the girls and boys have to internalise as common-sense and learn to live with is worrying. In Althusser's (1971) sense, as part of the schools' ideological state apparatuses they produced compliance in girls through ideological consent.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper highlights the prevalence of patriarchy within Zimbabwean schools and society in general. Its common- sensical nature seems to be associated with the harmony and the social division of labour that is required for social order. It is thus useful to invoke Sartre's (1980) assertion that since human beings are brought into a world which to them is devoid of any meaning but soon encounter social constructs, the puny and sometimes absurd creations of humans in their various institutionalised structures makes it necessary to deconstruct the gender biases, stereotypes and prejudices that come with the practice of child socialisation. In pursuit of this goal, Zimbabwean teachers thus need to encourage girls to take up courses or subjects such as Mathematics, Science and Technology. This can only be possible if they design curricula - subject content and teaching strategies – that promote gender equity. In addition, extra-curricular programmes can involve successful and inspirational women from the local community, industrialists, counsellors and parent liaisons that can be role models to the girls, especially during career days. Such women could be asked to speak to the pupils in order to deconstruct the myths and misconceptions of gender roles in society. In short, curriculum planners should not only be speaking to each other, but also need to establish well-functioning curriculum communities in which practices and views that are discriminatory in terms of gender are constantly examined and challenged with evidence that affirms girls' abilities and potential within schools as educational institutions. However, it is important that this be also emphasised by teacher education.

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