The Voices of Young Kenyans is an easy-to-read book that rightfully recommends the strengthening of HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation by integrating coherent life skills education into the cUlTiculum, in order to introduce groups of male and female learners to a gender responsive human rights approach to programming.

Per Engebak, Regional Director UNICEF ESARO, July 2004

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Africa: Young Voices Series No 2

THE VOICES OF YOUNG KENYANS

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GENDERED & SEXUAL IDENTITIES AND HIV/AIDS IN EDUCATION

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Acronyms

AGEI	African Girls Education Initiative
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ASAL	Arid and Semi Arid Lands
CfBT	Centre for British Teachers
ESARO	East and South African Regional Office
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FLE	Family Life Education
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GOK	Government of Kenya
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KCO	Kenya Country Office
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
KIE	Kenya Institute of Education
MOEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MOH	Ministry of Health
NACC	National AIDS Control Council
NASCOP	National AIDS/STIs Control Programme
STI	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

Foreword

This easy-to-read book presents the findings and recommendations of a study conducted by a team of Kenyan male and female researchers on how teenage girls and boys, the majority of who were in school, constructed gender and sexuality. Most of these teenage girls and boys hailed from urban Nairobi and rural Garissa districts. Those in school were between 13 and 15 years while those out of school were between 13 and 18 years. Using a focussed gender sensitive and young person-centred approach, the researchers show how a combination of qualitative research methods, which include both individual and group interview, observation and diary keeping helped to generate rich data, not only from the teenage girls and boys themselves, but also from their female and male teachers, community leaders and parents. This book demonstrates in a unique way, how the technique of triangulating different categories of data helps reveal, quite explicitly and convincingly, the multifarious ways in which gendered and sexual identities are produced in different social contexts of the school, family, and community as well as during the interviews. We see young people assuming their space as reflexive actors as they produce their identities and those of others - revealing the conflicts they encounter as they traverse various social sites in interactions with peers and significant adults - all the time producing and reconstructing different identities of the gendered self and 'other'.

Irrespective of the rural or urban setting of the research, the study depicts consistent polarisation of femininities and masculinities especially with regard to the gendered division of domestic work and the construction of sexuality. Here, both girls and the boys construct 'bad girls' as those who present themselves in ways that are perceived to be modern, 'sexy' and attractive to men and boys, for example, by wearing tight and short clothes or demonstrating a preference for the company of boys. Thus, female sexuality is *problematized* and used to stigmatize girls by constructing them as potential HIV carriers and spreaders of other STIs in ways that boys are not. Boys' sexuality is not questioned as boys are presented as *naturally sexual* with girls as their objects of desire. Rightfully, the researchers recommend the strengthening of HIV/AIDS education by integrating coherent life skills components that first introduce groups of learners to both a human rights approach and a gender sensitive orientation.

This book offers unique insights to educationalists within the formal and non-formal sub-sectors about how young people, inside and outside schools and in Kenyan settings, negotiate gender identities and sexualities at the crossroads of modernity and tradition as well as at the interface of childhood and adolescence. It shows clearly how relational social constructs of gender, sexuality, tradition and modernity evolve and how to engage young people in learning processes that enable them to counter vulnerability to HIV infection and other sexual and reproductive health problems. Without doubt, this book has direct relevance for educational policy and practice as demonstrated throughout and outlined in the recommendations section. It is therefore a required reading for all education stakeholders and those working to contain the disastrous spread of HIV/AIDS.

Dr. Nick Alipui
The UNICEF Representative, Kenya Country Office
November, 2003

Preface

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Introduction

This study was commissioned by UNICEF's Kenya Country Office and carried out between March and June 2002. The study was conducted in two districts: Garissa in Kenya's remote North Eastern Province, and the capital city Nairobi. The districts were specifically selected because UNICEF's African Girl Education Initiative (AGEI) and Girl Education projects were already ongoing in these areas. The choice of rural, mainly Muslim Garissa and modern, urban Nairobi allowed the researchers to study young people in two very different social and cultural contexts.

The purpose of the study was to provide information on the gendered and sexual identities of boys and girls, the influence of these identities on their sexual behaviour, and the status of HIV/AIDS education and life skills materials in Kenya's primary schools. The information gathered will feed into AGEI programmes and HIV/AIDS projects in several sectors – particularly those concerned with improving and strengthening AIDS education in Kenyan schools. It is hoped that other stakeholders providing life skills education to groups in local communities will also find this information useful. And it is hoped that some of the findings will inform and assist educationalists and policy makers in designing future programmes related to HIV/AIDS education.

This was a qualitative study that aimed to investigate and document baseline information on 'real' concerns and issues affecting young Kenyans, using a subject-centred approach. Thus, different types of interviews were conducted with various categories of subjects, in different school settings, in homes and in the community. The semi-structured interviews – with single-sex and mixed groups, as well as with individuals – sought to give each subject the space to share their experiences and opinions honestly and freely, in a frank and open atmosphere, with friendly, non-judgmental interviewers.

Pupils in the two schools studied were asked to volunteer for participation, while out-of-school children were identified through community members. Teachers involved in AIDS education in the schools and the parents of the children involved were also requested to participate. As well as the interviews and focus group discussions with children, parents and community leaders, the researchers conducted observations of several AIDS Awareness lessons, together with other informal gatherings outside school.

The study findings raise many important and timely issues that clearly demonstrate that gender and sexuality play a vital role in differentiating the experiences and identities of boys and girls, and in helping to understand the contextualised differences in the outcome of female and male education at the primary school level.

The findings show how gender influences what boys and girls are expected to know about sex and sexuality. It also appears to have direct links to their ability to determine the level of risk in their sexual relationships. In both districts, the feminine ideal was characterised by passivity, ignorance, and the objectification and sexualisation of girls and women – meaning that women and girls are largely expected to yield to men's and boys' sexual innuendos and desires. By comparison, masculinity was defined by sexual prowess and control over heterosexual relationships.

It was evident from the study findings that modernity and tradition have strong influences over the way that children and parents construct themselves. The modern way of life was associated with risky sexual situations in which children could find themselves. Even with such knowledge, however, girls and boys from both districts – particularly in Nairobi – preferred to describe themselves as 'modern' than as 'traditional'.

Girls who were both in and out of school expressed strong fears of falling pregnant. In order to be safe socially and sexually, girls and boys tended to prefer the companionship of their own gender. Parents in both districts expressed relatively greater concern about their daughters becoming pregnant than about them contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Other fears mentioned included rape, STIs, drug abuse, sexual abuse and harassment.

The 'modern' way of life was identified by many subjects as encouraging sexual practices that posed serious risks to sexual health. Modernity was defined as being manifested in provocative dressing among girls – but never boys – which encouraged sexual abuse and harassment. Watching television and videos with sexually inappropriate messages was condemned as a betrayal of traditional culture and sexual morality. The study also raised serious concerns about the cultural practices of female and male initiation, which continue to defy life-threatening realities, including HIV/AIDS. Despite the apparent glorification of these practices, the persistence of female circumcision was portrayed as posing special challenges because of its negative health implications and the high risk of initiates being exposed to HIV.

Most of the respondents, especially the children in school, identified their main source of information as the teachers providing AIDS Awareness lessons in schools. Other sources of information on HIV/AIDS were resource people who gave talks and lectures in schools. However, teachers in both districts complained that they had not been properly trained in AIDS education and had a severely limited capacity for delivering appropriate messages effectively. The lack of a syllabus and education materials were also identified as major constraints to effective teaching on HIV/AIDS. More alarmingly still, most of the children out of school said there were no effective channels whatsoever through which they could access reliable information on STIs, HIV/AIDS.

Alice Akunga with Eileen Kwamboka and Daniel Muia
Country Researchers and Authors

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Part One: Background

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Kenya and UNICEF share a strong concern over the rapid spread of HIV infection among young people in Kenya. Since the early 1990s, the Kenya AIDS Control Unit under the Ministry of Education has been involved in developing and institutionalising a comprehensive AIDS education curriculum within the nation's primary and secondary school syllabuses. UNICEF has supported the development of this curriculum and materials for teacher training, as well as the implementation of HIV/AIDS education at both primary and secondary levels. In 1994, life skills education was integrated into the HIV/AIDS curriculum with the aim of equipping young people with knowledge, attitudes and skills to empower them to protect themselves from AIDS – and to support those infected and affected by the disease. However, despite ongoing teacher training, nearly a decade later only a few life skills programmes appear to be providing genuinely child-focused, gender-sensitive information that is of clear relevance and practical use to children and young people. There remains a clear and pressing need to promote greater rights-based and child-friendly programmes on life skills that will empower young people to make informed decisions and avoid situations that put them at risk of HIV infection. Since neither communities nor young people are homogeneous, it is clearly important to conduct research on different ages and social groups that will accurately inform HIV/AIDS programmes and educators, as well as providing data upon which to design and orientate future HIV/AIDS education.

Both the Government of Kenya and UNICEF have expressed a commitment to research and programming founded upon a human rights perspective. This implies that children's views and opinions are considered on their own terms, allowing them the space and freedom to express their ideas and experiences. Subject-centred and gender-sensitive research with young people is a vital precondition for developing appropriate and effective life skills resources and pedagogies because it brings on board young people's perspectives, hopes, fears, expectations and interpretations – all of which are crucial for generating and developing appropriate and relevant learning resources. In addition, the process of involving young people in participatory dialogue during such research enhances their rights in participating in the development of life skills materials appropriate to them.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of this study included:

- Reviewing literature on gender, sexuality, young people and HIV/AIDS, as well as identifying the kind of methodologies used in relevant research;
- Investigating pupils' and teachers' experiences and understanding of the kinds of lessons and resources used in addressing life skills, sexuality and reproductive health issues;
- Investigating teachers' constructions of male and female pupils, and the ways in which they construct themselves in relation to them, with a view to exploring their sensitivity to gender power relations both in and outside class;
- Investigating the ways in which boys and girls construct their identities and develop relationships in different sites – including schools, homes and communities – and the effect of such identities on the spread of HIV/AIDS;
- Investigating how 'culture', 'tradition' and 'modernity' are understood by boys and girls, how these connect with the ways they construct themselves as gendered and sexual beings, and whether these constructions make them more or less susceptible to HIV infection.

Research Questions

To meet these objectives, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are boys' and girls' perceptions of 'tradition' and 'modernity', and how do they influence their behaviour?
- How do boys and girls construct their own and others' identities?
- What is the nature of the relationships that exist between boys and girls, and between them and their duty bearers?
- How do children perceive sexuality, and how do they perceive their own and others' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
- What is the status of sexuality and HIV/AIDS education in the study sites?

By answering these questions, the study helped to collate information on the sexual identities and behaviour of Kenyan boys and girls, and the current status of life skills

practices and AIDS education in the sampled primary schools. This information will be of interest and use to many HIV/AIDS projects – not only in education – and provides insights into new ways of creating AIDS awareness among pupils, teachers, parents and other duty bearers.

THE STATUS AND IMPACT OF HIV/AIDS

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a problem that affects every country in the world. By the end of 2001, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World Health Organisation estimated that 40 million people were living with HIV and AIDS. About one third of those living with HIV/AIDS are aged between 15 and 24 years – although most of them do not know that they have the HIV. Of the 40 million infected, 28.1 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa. More shocking still are the statistics pertaining to children. It is estimated that 87% of the children living with HIV/AIDS are in Africa. Out of 11.2 million children who have been orphaned by AIDS, 10.7 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

According to the National AIDS Control Council (NACC, 2000), approximately 2.2 million Kenyans were infected with HIV by 2000, while 1.5 million had developed AIDS since the epidemic was discovered in 1984. Three quarters of these cases occurred in adults between the ages of 20 and 45 years, with male and female cases being almost equal – presumably because HIV is predominantly transmitted through heterosexual contact. This age group also constitutes the most economically productive part of the population. The peak ages for AIDS cases are 20-24 years for women and 30-34 years for men. Young women in the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups are more than twice as likely to be infected as men in the same groups. Approximately one in every 10 reported AIDS cases occurs in children under five – most of who were infected by their mothers during childbirth or breastfeeding.

Impact on Social and Economic Development

The impact of the AIDS epidemic is being felt throughout Kenyan society, as people from all walks of life continue to die in enormous numbers (NACC, 2000). One devastating effect of AIDS is the increase in the number of orphans. These children often lack the proper care and supervision that they need to grow up as healthy, loved children. When care is provided, research shows that it bears heavily on the families' and communities' social and economic capabilities as relatives strive to cope with large numbers of orphans in often poor conditions. Research shows that orphaned children lived in relatively depressing conditions and were often mistreated, overworked and abused – verbally, physically and sexually (GOK/UNICEF, 2000). In Nairobi, for example, it was noted that many caregivers 'rent' out orphaned girls to old men for sex. Furthermore, children, especially girls, reported that they were sexually harassed when engaged in economic or family activities outside the home, such as grazing, collecting firewood or feeding cows (GOK/UNICEF, 2000a).

Children on the streets also report sexual harassment from older children. Such findings underscore the need to equip children and young people with the life skills to enable them to recognise and avoid risky situations and behaviour that can expose them to HIV infection. AIDS also has a significant impact on the population size. NASCOP (1999) estimates that Kenya's population could fall by as much as 3.6 million between 2000 and 2005. Much of this drop is due to the combined impact of AIDS deaths and fewer births from a smaller reproductive population depleted by rising deaths in the 15-49 age category.
Since the overall development of a country is largely dependent upon the health of its people, it is imperative that the health sector is seen to respond adequately and effectively to serious epidemics. The AIDS pandemic has not spared Kenya's health sector, where the number of people seeking health services continues to rise as their costs also rise. NACC (2000) estimates that the cost of hospital care for HIV/AIDS patients, using a low cost scenario, will rise to Ksh 3.7 billion in 2010 from Ksh 480 million in 1990. The high cost scenario will rise to Ksh 11.2 billion by 2010.

Families, firms and businesses are also reeling from the economic costs of AIDS. According to UNICEF ESARO (1999), the disease impoverishes families by decreasing household labour and income, and increasing medical and funeral expenses. Affected families often pull children out of school to reduce their expenditure and replace labour. AIDS reduces industrial revenue as employees fall ill or attend funerals, or are less productive due to poor health.

HIV/AIDS in Education

Kenya's 8-4-4 education framework – referring to eight years of primary education, four of secondary, and at least four of university – offers great opportunities for integrating AIDS education and related life skills learning. Although it is well documented that investing in primary education yields higher social returns than any other level of education, there have been serious downward trends in access, participation, retention and completion rates. Some of the challenges that have led to this situation are related to the impact of cost sharing, especially for children from poor families. Other challenges include early pregnancies and unfavourable cultural, home and school related factors.

Statistics indicate that, between 1989 and 1996, the primary Gross Enrolment Rate in Kenya fell from 95% to 77.5%. Rates for the 6-13 age cohort indicate a participation level in 1999 of only 68.2%. This, coupled with serious regional disparities in primary school enrolments, particularly in the arid lands where pastoralist communities predominate, is cause for great concern. Reasons for such low rates of education, particularly among girls within pastoralist groups, include traditional cultural attitudes, gender insensitive education practices, early marriages, female genital mutilation, and insecurity.

According to a World Bank (2000) report, the AIDS pandemic is also likely to significantly reduce the supply and demand of educational services, requiring changes in education

planning, content and delivery. High death rates among the reproductive age group leading to fewer births will invariably lead to fewer children of school-going age. In addition, about one third of infected mothers transfer HIV to their infants, further reducing the young population.

The World Bank projects a scenario whereby the AIDS epidemic will reduce substantially the demand for education in Kenya. Apart from fewer children attending school, affected families will also have fewer resources available for schooling due to overstretched health costs. Consequently, fewer children will be able to complete their schooling. Orphaned children, especially girls, will be pulled out of school due to lack of fees, or to care for ailing parents and family members. Others will resort to begging in the streets, or even to the commercial sex trade – where they themselves will be exposed to HIV.

By 2010, it is estimated that about 17% of Kenyan children under 14 will have lost one or both of their parents to AIDS. Many of these children will live in child-headed households where basic food and health needs are barely met. A study by Kelly (2000) estimates that children below 14 already head 7% of Zambia's 1.9 million households. In these households, hope for schooling is a far-fetched dream – not just because of lack of funds, but also because orphans have to overcome the stigma and social isolation of losing their parents to AIDS. Observations suggest that such orphans are much more likely to die from preventable diseases because of the mistaken belief that their illnesses are caused by AIDS, and that medical help is therefore pointless (UNAIDS, 1998). They are also bound to suffer from psycho-socio anxieties related to stigmatisation, discrimination, fear, shame and depression, which will badly affect their participation and performance at school (GOK/UNICEF, 2000).

The AIDS epidemic is also affecting the supply of education in Kenya. HIV infected teachers and education officers become increasingly unproductive due to their frequent sick leaves. The death of trained and experienced teachers and the interruption of teaching programmes due to illness reduce the quality and quantity of education, as teachers miss lessons and are unable to teach effectively (see GOK/UNICEF, 2000). Armour-Thomas (1989) found that teacher qualifications accounted for more than 90% of the variation in student achievements in mathematics and reading across the grades. Undoubtedly, the loss of qualified and experienced teachers poses a serious threat to the quality of education in Kenya. A report by World Bank (2000) reveals a steep rise in the number of teacher deaths from 1993 to 1999, with up to 1,800 deaths attributed to HIV/AIDS each year. This rate is likely to continue to rise if the epidemic remains uncontrolled.

In response to the devastation of AIDS, the Government of Kenya has introduced AIDS education into the regular curricula at several different levels of learning. As well as AIDS education in the classroom, the urgent need to provide orphaned children with vocational training to help them survive after leaving school has become a particularly pressing priority for life skills education in Kenya.

Gender Issues and HIV/AIDS in Education

As part of the African Girls Education Initiative (AGEI) project in the arid northern districts of Turkana, Wajir, Garissa, Mandera, Moyale and Marsabit, girls and young women are being provided with life skills that are specifically designed to empower them to avoid HIV infection. The AGEI project is also supporting various interventions to promote girls' education and to strengthen general education on HIV/AIDS prevention at the community level.

Studies carried out in various parts of Kenya show that a relatively high proportion of teenagers are sexually active, and that 18% of women become infected with HIV within two years of becoming sexually active. The KDHS (1998) reported that the average age for boys and girls to lose their virginity was 17. However, this may not be representative of the nomadic population, in which early marriage for girls is a valued aspect of the Maasai and Somali cultures. Various studies on sexuality reveal that the majority of Kenyan girls have their first sexual experience without consenting – and therefore, presumably, without negotiating for safer sex. Girls are thus predisposed to the risk of HIV at a relatively early age, making them potential HIV-positive mothers who are likely to bear children who are also infected.

While there is little information on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the nomadic population, observations reveal that cultural and traditional practices, high levels of poverty and low access to information places the nomadic population – and specifically the girl child – at high risk. The AGEI project is particularly focusing on girls and young women who are likely to miss out on formal schooling, and therefore on whatever life skills education is offered. It is hoped that the AGEI project will persuade more pastoralist families to invest in girls' education, and to promote positive health choices that recognise and avoid risky situations.

Socio-cultural education

Kenyan society comprises more than 40 ethnic communities popularly known as 'tribes'. Most of these communities construct their identities based upon tribal and linguistic orientations, as well as their ancestral origins (Chege, 2001). However, different forms of foreign cultural and religious influences have influenced customary traditions in terms of social relations, educational and gender values and practices.

In all Kenyan communities, many young people go through initiation ceremonies and rites of passage that are enhanced by instructions for preparation of adulthood and marriage. These instructions also include training on sexuality, sexual relations, and family life education. At this stage, children are expected to participate in community service as they continue with their schooling.

In most communities that adhere to traditional practices, a philosophy of gender relations and patterns of gendered education are evident (Bennaars, 1995). These may also entail physical processes, such as tattooing or piercing of body parts, circumcision, or surgical operations on the female genitalia, commonly referred to as 'female genital mutilation' (FGM). In some communities, the tendency to treat girl initiates as adults can result in sexual pressures that also interfere with girls' education (Chege, 2001).

According to David (1978), schools are specific places in which distinct relationships develop between pupils and teachers and the experiences of schooling and parental interactions become significant features in the socialisation process. Schools also provide important sites for the construction of femininities and masculinities, through which young people spend considerable time negotiating their gender identities and a future of adulthood (Chege, 2001). Observations confirm that the school environment often enhances the reproduction of sexual inequalities by confirming the sexual divisions and boundaries that are prevalent in the home.

Notably, schools tend to transmit negative messages about gender relations by objectifying girls, denying girls agency, and portraying boys as beings with an innate sense of agency. At least two studies have found the formal Kenyan curricula, as outlined in the school syllabus and defined through learning materials, teaching aids and pedagogy, to be gender blind (Wamahiu, 1994; Obura, 1991). Through these curricula, Kenyan schoolchildren – including those at the most impressionable ages – are exposed to messages with strong gender stereotypes, which explicitly demean women and feminine roles in society.

Sexuality, AIDS education and life skills

Studies on youth sexuality (AMREF, 1994; Kiragu, 1991; Njau and 1993) reveal that young people in Kenya become sexually active at a relatively early age. However, this finding is neither reflected adequately in policy interventions nor in programme development for young people. Since young people are becoming an increasingly important segment of the sexually active population, their rights to sexuality information and healthcare must be brought to the fore.

It is in this context that AIDS education in schools has become a key approach in the fight against the spread of HIV infection. In 1999, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology developed a National AIDS education syllabus designed to promote sexuality knowledge, life skills and attitudes that were relevant in the development and adaptation of positive behavioural change among young people (KIE, 1999: vii). It is hoped that, through this syllabus, learners will also acquire the communication skills necessary to share their lessons on HIV/AIDS with other young people.

The concept of life skills is a relatively new one in Kenya. Life skills aim to provide young people with practical strategies and abilities to negotiate positive choices and make informed decisions regarding their health and behaviour. Such skills thus give them the

capacity and confidence to interact with other young people and with adult members of society more effectively and responsibly (Centre for British Teachers, 2000).

Teacher education

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and UNICEF recognise that providing young people with reliable and accurate information on HIV/AIDS is a vital step in preventing and controlling the spread of the disease (MOH 1997, 1999). In order to prepare teachers to provide practical AIDS education in schools, the Government had trained approximately 4,000 teachers by the end of 2000, and aims to train a total of 30,000 primary teachers – or one teacher per school. This programme is being supplemented by the Centre for British Teachers' Primary School Action for Better Health (PSABH) project, which aims to initiate positive behaviour changes in sexual relationships among upper primary school pupils through the integration of HIV/AIDS topics into 'carrier subjects' such as science, GHC, home science and religious education, and 'communication subjects' such as English, Kiswahili, music, art, mathematics and physical education.

MOEST also recommends that secondary schools incorporate AIDS education into subjects such as biology, home science, religious education, social education, ethics and geography. The procedures of integration seem largely to be left to the teachers' own creativity.

AIDS education materials

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, through its Curriculum Development Centre at the Kenya Institute of Education, has developed a series of AIDS education materials for primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. These include:

- A National AIDS Education Syllabus for Schools and Colleges (1999);
- An AIDS Education Facilitator's Handbook (1999);
- *Let's Talk About AIDS* – three sets of textbooks for classes 1-3, 4-5 and 6-8;
- *Bloom or Doom - Your Choice* – a secondary resource book.

Constraints facing AIDS education

In a 2000 study by GOK/UNICEF, the majority of Kenyan teachers said they had not received guidelines on how to integrate AIDS education into their classes. They complained of an overcrowded curriculum that left little time for the integration of HIV/AIDS education. Because of these hitches, most teachers said they did not teach what was outlined in the AIDS education curricula. They observed that, as HIV/AIDS had not been made a subject in its own right, most teachers did not give it the time or the attention that it warranted. The lack of teaching and learning materials was also identified as a handicap to the learning process.

The fact that HIV/AIDS education is regarded as a controversial subject also poses another constraint to teachers, many of whom feel uncomfortable discussing issues of sexuality that are considered taboo in their communities. The presence in school of children and

teachers who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS also makes teaching of these topics more difficult.

It is reportedly a common practice in Kenyan schools to ignore non-examinable subjects. As several of the 'carrier' subjects for HIV/AIDS education are no longer examinable, it is not surprising that, even when teachers claim to be integrating HIV/AIDS education, they pay much more attention to the core subject than its AIDS-related content. This raises genuine concerns that AIDS education is not being covered adequately – a concern that makes this study an even more important undertaking.

Knowledge Gaps

From the literature review, it is clear that HIV and AIDS are strongly affecting most sectors of Kenya's economy and society. The education sector itself is one of the hardest hit, with the epidemic reducing both demand for and the supply of education. As the education system plays a vital role in national development, it is necessary to find out how the Government's AIDS education programme is being implemented, and to document both the successes and constraints affecting the learning processes.

Another factor that has not been adequately addressed to date is the sexual maturation that marks primary-age girls' and boys' transition from childhood to teenage and young adulthood. This period is usually characterised by emotional, physical and behavioural changes that can create anxiety and confusion among young people, who do not know whether to act as adults or children. At this stage, research shows that girls, more than boys, tend to portray low levels of educational motivation and achievement, mainly because of pressures of a sexual nature that are borne on them by men and boys. Surrendering to such pressures is likely to expose girls to the risk of contracting HIV. It is therefore vital to explore ways in which young people are constructing their sexual and gender identities at this pubescent 'crossroads', how they are responding to physical and emotional changes – and how they interpret AIDS education within the context of their social life and youth culture.

The literature review reveals that social systems, especially the school and the family, have largely failed to address the needs of young Kenyans as they mature into adulthood. This research was designed to address such failures, and to explore how young primary school adolescents are responding to their own needs without the assistance of their teachers and parents. The key task in the study was, therefore, to bring young people 'on board' in identifying knowledge gaps regarding the construction of sexual and gender identities, and discovering how such constructions are influencing young people's behaviour in ways that make them more or less susceptible to HIV infection

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Part Two: Research Methodology

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a qualitative research methodology, with in-depth interviews – of individuals and mixed and single-sex groups – supplemented by classroom and out-of-school observations. This enabled the researchers to study the 'real life' experiences of pupils and out-of-school children with regard to their sexual identities, their behaviour, and their relationships with other young people and significant adults. The participants were positioned as subjects who actively engaged in the construction of their gendered and sexual identities as they went about their everyday lives: at school, at home, and in the community.

The interviewers made every effort to be 'interviewee-centred', picking up and exploring any pertinent points raised by individual boys and girls. The interviewees thus determined the pace and direction of all the interviews. At times, it was necessary to conduct several interviews with the same pupils, and even to mix with them in their classrooms in order to establish greater rapport with them. The interviews were undertaken in different settings with both school pupils and out-of-school children, in order to provide information on how different children construct their identities in different contexts. The researchers made every effort to remain friendly, flexible and non-judgmental, to fit into their subjects' schedules and gain their full confidence.

The research approach emphasised 'self-reflexivity', as in practice the researchers were not detached and objective, but became, inevitably, enmeshed in the world of their subjects. The subjects were continually positioning the researchers in different and particular ways (just as they themselves were being positioned), which invariably influenced the tone and subject matter of each interview. For this reason, female and male researchers were appointed to conduct interviews with single-sex groups of girls and boys, respectively, as well as with individuals and mixed groups. This was a particularly important strategy in Garissa, where the Somali Islamic culture frowns upon work with mixed-sex groups. 'Cross-interviews' were also conducted, through which different researchers interviewed the same subjects – revealing how the researchers' ages and genders influenced the ways in which the subjects positioned and constructed their identities.

Research Sites and Sampling

The research was undertaken in Garissa and Nairobi districts, which respectively represented a rural and an urban environment. Both districts have also participated in UNICEF programmes on education, health and HIV/AIDS, including the African Girl Education Initiative (AGEI) and girl education projects. Despite this, however, the participation of girls in education in these areas – particularly in Garissa – remains persistently low. Efforts were also made to select rural and urban sites where similarities and differences in social constructions of gender and sexuality could be clearly linked to local cultures, lifestyles, and socio-religious beliefs and practices.

The two schools were selected because they fulfilled three main criteria. Both were co-educational public primary schools, with pupils from different backgrounds (races and religions), and were easily accessible to the research teams. Although the teams initially aimed to interview pupil samples from the official Standard 5-8 age group (ie. 10-14 years), it soon became apparent that both schools contained – and the interviews would thus include – pupils of up to 17 years.

From each school, a sample of 20 pupils (10 boys and 10 girls) aged 10-17 was selected, including a broad representation of ages, social and cultural backgrounds. Community leaders helped to select a further 10 out-of-school children of the same ages in each district. Teachers involved in teaching 'carrier subjects' on AIDS education in both schools also formed part of the research sample, together with the parents of participating children and willing community leaders.

At the end of the fieldwork, a total of 56 pupils (27 girls and 29 boys), 20 out-of-school children (12 girls and eight boys), 18 teachers (10 male and eight female), 17 parents (14 female and three male), and 25 community leaders (21 male and four female) participated in the study.

The Research Sample

Respondent	Garissa			Nairobi			Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Pupils	14	10	24	15	17	32	56
Out of school	2	5	7	6	7	13	20
Teachers	7	1	8	3	7	10	18
Parents	1	7	8	2	7	9	17

In Garissa, 39 in-depth interviews were conducted: 22 with pupils, seven with the out-of-school children, six with teachers, and four with parents. Seven focus group discussions were held (one with teachers, one with community leaders, one with parents, three with pupils, and one with out-of-school children), 16 essays were submitted by pupils, 12 pupils and four teachers filled in diaries, and researchers observed two AIDS education lessons. In Nairobi, 44 in-depth interviews were conducted: 29 with pupils, four with the out-of-school children, four with teachers, and seven with parents. There were eight focus group discussions (one with teachers, one with community leaders, one with parents, three with pupils, and two with out-of-school children), 21 pupils wrote essays or kept diaries, and two AIDS education lessons were observed.

Data Collection

In both the schools and non-school sites, research data was collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, diary keeping, essay writing and observations, as outlined in the table below:

Research activities

METHOD	WHY USED	WITH/BYWHOM	NUMBER OF RESEARCHS/ RESPONDENTS
Research diaries	Everyday for planning and reviewing the day to day proceedings of the research	By each researcher, daily	All researchers
Interviews	Obtain information on specific questions from individual respondents	With children, parents and teachers	One researcher per subject
Focus group discussion	To identify knowledge and ideas on an issue/topic, the feelings, behaviours and attitudes in a particular context	8-12 persons of similar characteristics depending on the research questions	Two researchers; one facilitating and one recording
Essay	To generate information about an individual's identity	With children in school	One researcher for a group of pupils
Diaries	Obtain information from individuals on certain issues based on daily aspects of their experiences	With children in school and the teachers	All the children and the teachers to be given diaries to record
Observation	AIDS education lessons, and to note any relevant aspects in the environment	With teachers and pupils	All researchers

Pre-testing and Courtesy Calls

Before the fieldwork commenced, the various research methods were pre-tested with respondents in several settings in Nairobi. The necessary adjustments were made and each method refined for use by the study. Researchers began their data collection by paying a courtesy call on all the relevant authorities in the research sites. These included the District Commissioners, District Education Officers, administrative chiefs and local school heads. During these courtesy calls, the researchers introduced themselves, explained the background to their research, and sought consent and cooperation.

Data Management and Analysis Procedures

In order to ensure the consistency and reliability of the data collected, all the researchers attended a training session to share their experiences and plan the data collection and analysis procedures. During the data collection process, the researchers met each evening to review their day's work, and to identify key issues for follow up.

All the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded on audio-tape, which was subsequently transcribed. After each discussion, the facilitator and recorder discussed their notes and compiled a comprehensive report. In Garissa, some of the respondents opted to use their first language, Somali, during the interviews. Their responses were subsequently translated and analysed. The NUD*IST (Non-numeric Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising) computer programme was used in the analysis of qualitative data. Analysis involved coding, transcribing qualitative data, and assigning labels to variable categories. Common themes were established and clustered in a patterned order to help identify the key variables that described general concepts. Inferences were then made from particular data categories under the selected themes, and conclusions drawn based on available field evidence.

Recruitment of Researchers

Co-researchers were identified, recruited and trained before the study commenced. Some of the researchers came from the areas where the research was undertaken and were thus conversant with the subjects' language and culture. All the researchers had strong experience in conducting qualitative research and were familiar with issues relating to children and HIV/AIDS. A three-day training workshop conducted by UNICEF's International Consultant outlined the rationale for the research, explained the data collection, analysis and transcription methods, emphasised the need for child-centred research, and cautioned over the ethical and cultural concerns that such a study could attract. The workshop also enabled the researchers to practice and role-play the use of various research tools and methods, and to share their hopes and concerns for the project.

Research ethics

Throughout the research process, the researchers endeavoured to stay focused upon strong ethical principles, which included seeking informed consent from each of the young people taking part, as well as from their parents or caregivers. This involved informing the

individual children of the research aims, methods and topics, what the data would be used for, and giving them the right to withdraw at any time. The researchers closely followed a checklist of ethical rules, such as protecting younger participants from harmful information, and every day discussed the ethical constraints that emerged during their fieldwork The researchers' 'ethical checklist' included the following guiding principles:

- Be non-judgmental
- Ensure that no child, adult or community suffers any harm as a result of the research
- Protect the anonymity, confidentiality and security of all subjects
- Ensure that subjects do not get distressed during the fieldwork
- Respond empathetically to any distress on the subjects' part
- Stay committed to the children's best interests throughout
- Respect everyone's right to privacy, avoid intrusive questions
- Do not probe for information when it appears that a subject would rather not answer
- Do not act as a teacher or instructor, tell children they are wrong or contradict them
- Try to minimise the power imbalance inherent in relations between children and adults
- Respect local cultural traditions, religious codes, social hierarchies, behavioural codes, dress codes, manners, etc.;
- Do not give children information about things they do not yet know, or are not yet ready to know.

Fieldwork Challenges

Several constraints and challenges emerged during the course of the study, including:

1. Time became a constraint as the study commenced during the April school holidays. There were also rumours of a national teachers' strike, expected to start in May 2002, which necessitated the researchers move fast to collect data from the classes attending tuition, mainly Standards 7-8 in Nairobi and 5-8 in Garissa, with pupils aged from 12 to 17. Consequently, children aged 10 and 11 were largely ignored in the research.
2. In Nairobi, the community members expressed considerable research fatigue, complaining that they had never benefited from the countless studies that had been done in their community.
3. Some issues such as sex and sexuality were considered taboo in Garissa and, as such, discussions about them with the community and the school children remained guarded.
4. There were limitations in accessing some of the targeted respondents, such as the out-of-school children in Garissa, where boys left for grazing early in the morning and returned late, while girls were busy for most of the day with domestic chores.
5. Garissa's reputation for insecurity meant that many of the researchers were cautious and apprehensive about their personal safety.
6. There was – and remains – concern that some of the more complex translations into the Somali language and vice versa may have caused some meanings to be lost or altered.
7. Culturally, it was considered inappropriate for the girls in Garissa to talk to male researchers. This posed a dilemma during the process of establishing the different ways in which girls and boys constructed their identities in relation to different categories of researchers.

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Part Three: A) RESEARCH FINDINGS

Note: Pseudonyms have been used for all the young and adult subjects in the following interviews and diary extracts, in order to protect their identities. Any resemblance to the names of actual people is unintentional.

Study Locale and Subjects

Garissa District is one of three districts that form Kenya's Northeastern Province. It borders Wajir District to the north, Lamu District to the south, Tana River and Isiolo districts to the west, and the border with Somalia to the east. This largely arid district covers 44,952 square kilometres, and is sparsely populated with 392,510 people – an average of nine people per square kilometre (GOK, 2000). The population is concentrated in the main urban centres of Garissa and Liboi, and around water points. Most residents hail from the Somali ethnic group, although there are also people from the other Kenyan ethnic groups in the urban centres. Garissa is comprised of low-lying arid lands, which are hot and dry through most of the year, except for often torrential rains in March/April and October/ December. Mean rainfall ranges between 23.6mm and 34.2mm. Livestock keeping forms the major economic activity in the area, where frequent droughts and unreliable rainfall do not favour the growth of pasture for livestock rearing or agricultural activities. The major land use is nomadic pastoralism, with some agriculture along the Tana River, where people grow bananas and other fruit in

flood zones. Administratively, the district is subdivided into five divisions. This study was carried out in Sankuri Division, which covers 1,085 square kilometres with a population of just 8,007 people (District Development Plan, 1998-2001).

Socio-sexual control mechanisms

Garissa is inhabited largely by members of the Somali ethnic community, who are predominantly Muslim and nomadic pastoralists. Their social organisation is clearly gendered, with sexual relations governed by strong codes of sexual morality.

During the fieldwork, various key informants outlined the cultural regulations that help to govern sexual behaviour among the Somali people. Such mechanisms were designed, ostensibly, to 'protect' women and girls and to encourage fidelity in both sexes. Examples of these social control mechanisms and sanctions include the following:

- **Men who beat their wives** are fined, for example one or two goats, according to the extent of their wife's injuries.
- **Men who touch women without their consent** are required to pay the complainant or her relatives between two and four cows.
- **Attempted rape**, as witnessed in a woman's torn clothes or other physical evidence, will result in the assailant paying her the equivalent of her full bride price, depending on the clan and economic status of her family. The offender's clan and family members will pay the cost in the form of animals or money. Failure to pay these damages can prompt the victim's male relatives to retaliate in the fashion of 'an eye for an eye'.
- **Actual rape** usually results in the rapist or his family being ordered to pay the full dowry and bride price. The offender's hands are then tied and he is hanged from a tree and whipped by the clan members. The number of lashes will vary according to the regulations of the offended clan.
- **Men who sneak into women's houses with suspected sexual intent** while the women are asleep are punished. In case of suspected collusion between the women and the men, they will both receive the same number of whip lashes.
- **If an unmarried pregnant woman alleges that more than one man** was responsible for her pregnancy, she will be condemned to remain unmarried for the rest of her life. However, if she identifies only one man, he will be forced to marry her .
- **Any word uttered by a lady against a man** is taken to be final. **Taboos related to sexuality** were also commonplace as exemplified below.
- **Fractures of any limb** may result in the seclusion of husbands from their wives in order to avoid sexual intercourse; otherwise, it is believed that the fracture will not heal. The man will be relocated to a separate room or house during the healing process.
- **If a husband develops a boil**, i.e. an inflamed swelling or abscess, he may be separated from his wife to avoid sex. It is believed that having sex in such a condition can cause death.
- **After childbirth**, a woman is isolated and put on a special diet for 30 days if she has had a girl child and 45 days if she has had a boy child, signifying the strong role of gender in the social construction of motherhood, femininities and masculinities.

- **The birth of a boy** is welcomed by ululations, while silence accompanies the birth of a girl.
- **In counting the number of children** in his family, the father counts only the boys.
- **At meal times**, girls and women do not eat in the presence of men.
- **A woman is not supposed to call her husband by name**, which is associated with disrespect.
- **Women are often offered the least succulent parts of an animal's meat**, such as the intestines, tail and head, while men consume all the other parts.
- **A woman is not allowed into a meeting of men**, even to deliver an urgent message. She is required to stand far from the group of men, showing them her back as a sign that she needs to talk with one of them.
- **A woman is not allowed to contribute to a meeting**, because it is against custom to participate in clan meetings comprising exclusively of men.

Due to the strict enforcement of most of these practices, taboos and punishments, key informants reported that there were very few cases of rape or sexual offences. Some of these sanctions provide useful traditions that could be adapted into modern schooling to create an environment that is physically and psychologically safer for girls and women. Otherwise, removing girls from school as a way of protecting them – as has been the custom in the past – seems to contradict the purpose of sexual sanctions that are meant to empower women and girls to live freer, safer lives. However, it seems that these sanctions, many of which are meant to safeguard the dignity of female sexuality and enhance mutual respect across the genders, are largely detached from the purposes of modern education and development.

We believe that this quandary calls for new ways to be established through which schoolgirls can benefit, educationally and socially, from traditional sanctions. Such a process would undoubtedly benefit from community education programmes to educate boys and men about the social benefits of girls and women's education. It is, however, instructive that the Garissa community appears caught up in a widespread dilemma about allowing girls to enrol in school, while at the same time dealing with perceived threats that schooling poses to their perceptions of gender relations and constructions of femininity and masculinity. The concern that attending school can jeopardise girls' marriage chances is also clearly a major obstacle to the development of education among the Somali community in Garissa.

The primary School Site

The primary school under study is located 33 kilometres north of Garissa town, in the educational zone of Central Division. It is one of the large boarding school in Garissa District, with additional provisions for day schooling. At the time of the project, the school had 244 pupils, of which 45 – a mere 18% – were girls. While the majority of day school pupils came from the neighbouring village of Bula, most of the boarders came from

Garissa town. The school had 10 teachers, of whom only one was female. The boarding section had 107 boarders, all of them boys. In 2001, the school was the best performer in Northeastern province in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), with a mean score of 264 marks out of 500.

The school provided several reasons for the low enrolment of girls and the non-existence of girl boarders, including:

- Many parents do not want their daughters to board for fear of 'social problems', including their mixing with boys;
- The boarding fees are relatively high, and many parents are unwilling to invest as much in their daughters' education as their sons';
- The school does not have a matron to take care of girls, and therefore parents feel the girls will be insecure as boarders;
- There is a fear that bandits may physically attack (or rape) girls in the boarding section;
- Girls have been lured into employment in neighbouring refugee camps;
- Some parents make early marriage plans for their daughters.

Socio-Economic Characteristics

The subjects of our research – children, parents, teachers and community leaders – were all Muslims from the Somali ethnic group. The smallest family comprised five members, while the largest had 14. Some of the children were living with guardians such as aunts and uncles. Livestock keeping was the main occupation of virtually all the respondents' families, and many of the male relatives were away with the animals searching for pasture. The families' other occupations included small-scale agriculture, shop-keeping and formal employment.

Gender Roles Allocated to Children

The study explored several aspects of the school, home and community environment. It was evident that individual roles at school, at home and in the community were clearly defined along cultural lines, and in ways that reflected the community's gender expectations.

There seemed to be a strong consensus among the respondents as to what roles boys and girls should perform at home and in the community. Girls were involved mostly in domestic chores while the boys were responsible for herding cattle, fetching water and minding their families' farms. Boys whose parents operated small businesses reported that they assisted their parents in the trade. Like boys in school, out-of-school boys minded their families' animals, transported bananas from the farm, and fetched water. Schoolgirls performed household chores, such as cooking, washing utensils and clothes, sweeping the compound, and fetching firewood. By comparison, girls who were out of school said that they fetched water, transported milk for sale in the town, looked after the goats, and did numerous domestic chores, including cooking and washing utensils. While the

children's work reflected apparent gender divisions, it was clear that most of the out-of-school girls were overburdened with traditional girls' work as well as part of what could be described as traditional boys' work.

In school, boys were responsible for cleaning the classrooms while girls cleaned the offices and staff rooms. The reasons given by boys and girls as well as teachers for this division of responsibilities were that the girls cleaned the offices better than the boys, and that there were too few girls to clean the classrooms. Due to 'religious reasons' that require gender segregation, there was a tendency to separate the boys from the girls. As Omari, a 15-year-old Standard 7 boy, stated:

> **It is not Islamic for boys and girls to work together.**

Undoubtedly, religious culture played a significant role in the gendering of social life, as well as defining the division of work between the sexes.

Gender Roles Performed by Parents

The study findings indicated that the roles of mothers and fathers varied, according to whether the family was rural or urban. In rural families, the father was portrayed as the person responsible for assigning duties to all members of the family. He was perceived as the provider and protector of his family, and the chief trader of the family livestock. By comparison, in the urban family, pupils reported that their fathers worked in salaried employment, did business, and generally provided for the family. Some of the children perceived their fathers as idlers who 'do nothing'. Two out-of-school children, Amina, a 13-year-old girl, and Ahmed, a 14-year-old boy, expressed this perception unequivocally.

Mothers' roles included taking care of their children, cooking, fetching water, cleaning the house, and washing the clothes. Some mothers were also involved in transporting milk to Garissa for sale. However, it was not clear whether they had any control over the financial proceeds from this trade. Two Standard 7 boys described their mothers as deputising in their fathers' absence. Although several of the out-of-school children reported their mothers as doing all the household duties, thatching their houses and taking care of the children, others, such as 13-year-old Asha, who perceived the parental roles differently said:

> **Mothers just stay at home and do nothing; they make stories [while fathers burn charcoal and take care of the animals].**

Boys' and Girls' Leisure Time

In order to get a picture of the everyday lives of children in Garissa, the children were asked to describe how they spent their leisure time. It was evident from the findings that the concept of 'free time' did not make much sense to these children – especially to the girls, who seemed to be occupied with domestic duties for most of the time. In fact,

some of their 'free time activities' were actually duties assigned to them by their parents, or things that they were obliged to do. Strikingly, even the boys confirmed that girls hardly ever enjoyed time to themselves. This view was captured in the words of Mohammed, a 15-year-old Standard 7 boy, who, after failing to identify any girls' free time activities, asserted that,

> **Girls are not allowed to be free.**

Both the boys and the girls reported in interviews that they attended *madarasa* or religious instruction classes during their free time. This revelation suggests that children in the Garissa school hardly enjoyed any free time to do what they wished, such as playing with friends. It was reported that the scarce opportunities that boys had to themselves were usually spent playing football, swimming in the river, sleeping and relaxing, visiting friends and relatives, reading or doing revision. One 13-year-old Standard 6 boy said he spent his free time playing with his sisters – although he was the only boy who said this. Boys from urban areas said that, during their free time, they went to town to visit relatives. The perception of girls was that boys were relatively freer, and thus were able to play around while girls worked at home.

The girls said that during their scarce free time they 'shared stories' or 'chatted' among themselves. They also discussed homework, helped their parents, played hide-and-seek, volleyball and skipping, or read books. According to Zainabu, a 14-year-old Standard 7 girl, during their free time,

> **Girls bathe, comb their hair, do homework and walk around a bit.**

There appeared to be consensus that girls, more than boys, were restricted by societal norms that 'policed' the feminine behaviour expected of them. Even when they 'walked around' in the village, they had to seek parental permission and were expected to move in a group – a practice that served as a security measure as well as well as a control against sexual activity. Maimuna, a 15-year-old girl in Standard 5, explained how parents were generally less responsive to girls when they requested consent to visit their friends:

> **Parents refuse, because parents suspect girls might go to do bad things... in case a girl is spotted in a bad place, it is reported to her father. It is shame for a girl to move around. Therefore she stays at home.**

From our interviews and discussions with pupils, it was apparent that children – especially girls – experienced considerable and strictly enforced parental controls. Sanctions were employed to ensure conformity to social norms by every member of the community. It was also reported that the Islamic religion functioned effectively as a social mechanism that regulated sexual behaviour, particularly among young people.

Interviews with out-of-school boys reveal that boys spent most of their free time doing farm work, fetching water, playing or attending *duksi* (traditional religious school). Out-

of-school girls, by comparison, spent most of their free time transporting milk to the market. During an individual interview with Fatuma, a 16-year-old out-of-school girl, perceptions about how girls were being deprived of their rights to free time emerged strongly. Describing the plight of girls, Fatuma asserted simply that,

We have no free time.

This perception was supported by the accounts of most respondents and the researchers themselves, who observed that most of the time girls were occupied with various domestic chores. Indeed, even getting time to participate in the interviews posed a problem for most of the out-of-school girls.

Tradition and Modernity

In modern society, those who subscribe to cultural norms and practices – and resist changes to them – are often described as 'traditional', while those who constantly adjust to new ways of social behaviour are referred to as 'modern'. It is, however, important to consider these two terms as relational – in other words, descriptions that only exist in relation to each other.

To the boys and girls in Garissa, 'modernity' was associated with the following:

- Fashionable contemporary modes of dressing;
- Being educated or going to school;
- Living in an urban setting;
- Watching video shows.

By contrast, 'tradition' was associated with:

- Circumcision of girls;
- Wearing traditional dresses, ie. *bui-bui*, *dhira*;
- Attending *madarasa* and *duksi*;
- Getting married early on;
- Recognising men as superior to women;
- Conforming to prescribed societal gendered roles.

Children Talking about Tradition and Modernity

Schoolboys and schoolgirls participating in the interviews described the nomadic pastoral ways of life, 'living in the bush' and looking after animals as 'traditional'. The use of herbal medicine, wife-beating, not enrolling children in school, and wearing Muslim attire were also among the characteristics identified as 'traditional'. By comparison, 'modernity' was associated with attending school and generally being knowledgeable about the issues of the community and the world. Formalised education was perceived to be central to the process of modernisation. Other facets of 'modern living' included living in towns, chewing *miraa* (qat), smoking cigarettes, and driving motor vehicles. Some boys argued that, in the context of modernity, having boyfriends or girlfriends was not considered shameful –

as was the case in traditional Somali culture.
The out-of-school girls said they preferred traditional ways of life because modernity had ushered in sexual practices that resulted in the loss of respect for girls in the community. However, schoolgirls participating in the focus group discussions argued that modernity had brought about formal education, which was bound to help improve their lives.

Adults Talking about Tradition and Modernity

Most of the parents interviewed associated modernity with social problems and dangerous lifestyles, and said that 'modern culture' led people to stray away from God. Most teachers said that, apart from the aspect of schooling, most of their pupils led very traditional lives, which included early marriages and circumcision for both boys and girls. In accordance with Somali culture, the sitting arrangements in the classrooms segregated the girls from the boys. According to one teacher, Somali girls were expected to be conservative and shy, while boys were encouraged to be confident and outspoken. However, all the teachers claimed that they promoted certain aspects of modernity among their students, such as attending school and interacting with the opposite sex. They also said that they urged their pupils to shun 'harmful' traditional practices, such as early marriage. Although gender segregation in class was a cultural requirement, the teachers were emphatic that social interaction between the sexes was healthy as it did not exceed the defined sexual boundaries that would raise concern in the community. Despite this, however, they all still observed gender segregation in their classrooms, thus, giving in to the broader scheme of social expectations and pressure.

Living 'in the bush' or living in town

The concept of living 'in the bush' compared with living in town emerged frequently as the respondents compared tradition and modernity. Living in the bush was associated with the traditional nomadic way of life, whereby pastoralist families moved constantly in search of pasture and water for their animals. Clearly, this comparison is very important as it underscores the participants' conception of dynamic change in their community, through which families are transforming their lifestyles by settling in and around the towns. Considering that urbanisation is a result of modernisation processes, it is reasonable that the study subjects considered their new urban lifestyles as an indication of modernity. Most of the teachers claimed to be both traditional and modern, arguing that, as modern people, they were educated, learned, dressed in modern clothing and lived a modern way of life, while they also maintained 'good aspects' of their traditional cultures, such as instilling discipline and moral values in their pupils – particularly as regards sexual morality. Some of the parents and community respondents perceived themselves as traditional, based upon their lifestyles and cultural values. Most of the parents associated modernity with living in town and in modern houses, and with formal schooling. Many said their children preferred modernity as they associated tradition with 'backwardness', and associated modernity with progressive education and schooling.

During a focus group discussion with community leaders, the perceived adverse effects of modernity were addressed. Below is an excerpt of the discussion:



Interviewer: **What are the main issues that affect the lives of boys and girls?**

Woman leader: **Going away from our traditions and culture…**

Chief: **Changing lifestyles of people have affected our boys and girls. Boys and girls were conservative, but today things have changed… Education [has] brought changes to boys and girls. Modernity has brought *miraa*, cinemas, video shows, and these have affected their lives.**

Woman leader: **Mixing of sexes was not there in the old good days. These days, girls and boys are mixed in school, town and water points. Cases of pregnancies of girls are increasing as a result of immorality.**

In this discussion, it was apparent that the community's opinion leaders, who included parents, feared that their children would be negatively affected by modernity. Such fears have significant implications for education and schooling, which many of the participants considered incompatible with perceived 'good' traditions.

Influences of tradition and modernity on boys' and girls' behaviour

The ways in which young people and adults constructed modernity and tradition were closely linked to how the children identified themselves as either progressive or backward. What was clear, however, was an apparent anxiety to convey their identities in a manner that was commensurate with their community's expectations of 'true' Somali girls and boys. Observations revealed that childrearing practices and school cultures were instrumental in raising awareness of the boundaries between tradition and modernity among the youth, and in policing the expression of their identities and respect of gender boundaries in accordance with ascribed femininities and masculinities. Such awareness, it seems, was crucial in the selection of 'good' traditional practices, which the community wished to retain as it scrutinised aspects of modern life that could benefit its children.

All of the children who were out of school described their parents as traditional people. Some of the schoolboys perceived their parents as traditional, perhaps because they observed them looking after animals, living 'in the bush', dressing in traditional attire and keeping their children out of school.

A few of the schoolboys and most of the schoolgirls described their parents as modern people, claiming that they were urban residents who were knowledgeable about the world outside their community, and were relatively exposed to modern lifestyles. Hasha, a 15-year-old girl in Standard 5 exemplified this perception, saying:

> **My parents are modern because they know what is happening in the world.**

Most of the out-of-school children maintained that they had been brought up in 'traditional' style and practised traditional ways of life. By comparison, most school pupils perceived themselves as 'modern', arguing that they did not herd animals, were in school, went to *madarasa* and dressed in modern clothing. The girls rationalised that because of modernity, they were able to wear 'good clothes', compared to the traditional *dhira*. To girls like 15-year-old Zaituni and Hassan, a 14-year-old boy, modernity was associated with positive facets of education, such as literacy skills, good behaviour and critical thinking, which helped them to make decisions about their personal and social behaviour. As Hassan asserted,

> **I learn in school and know how to protect myself.**

His classmate, Ali, who was also 14 years old, defined himself confidently, saying:

> **I am a modern boy. I know how to cross roads by looking both sides, left and right. Those from the jungle do not know. I can speak Kiswahili…**

Although most of the schoolboys and girls perceived themselves as advantaged over children from more traditional backgrounds, many of their parents saw modernity as a negative influence on young people. Many said they felt that modernity had eroded the respect that boys and girls were expected to show their parents. Modern boys were accused of taking home their girlfriends, which was considered highly disrespectful. Modernity, according to some of the parents, had changed children's behaviour, making it difficult to predict what sorts of adults they would become. Concern was also expressed about their daughters, who through education would become empowered to challenge traditional gender relations. Such empowerment was likely to be perceived as an affront to the perennial ways of constructing docile forms of femininities. Many parents expressed anxiety over girls' tendency to mature relatively early, adding that – away from the watchful eye of their parents – they were more likely to have boyfriends, engage in sexual activities that could result in pregnancy, and bring shame to their families. Even after raising these concerns, some of the parents, like Mrs. Aro in the following excerpt, pointed out that parents had largely failed to prepare their daughters for puberty in ways that would empower them for responsible sexual behaviour:


Interviewer: **Some of you have daughters who are maturing. What advice do you give them?**

Mrs. Aro:	**To say the truth, we don't prepare them. They learn from their peers. You know your daughter has her periods from prayers. She stops praying… (During menstruation, girls and women abstain from prayer rituals as blood is considered 'unclean'.)**

Subjects Constructing their Gender Identities

The boys and the girls who took part in this study seemed to have a clear perception about their own identities. They described themselves in relation to the values attached to the 'self' and how they thought that other people perceived them. Self-identity was constructed using biological and social qualities, such as age, sex and parentage, as well as their class in school.

Physical attributes were also used to enhance identities. For example, bodily beauty, fitness, strength and general appearance were presented as important assets in the construction of self-identities. Qualities that transcended the physical, such as virtues of good behaviour, respect for parents, discipline, industriousness and religious behaviour were also cited. The following self-descriptions were typical of the responses given:

I am a disciplined girl and a practicing Muslim. (15-year-old Standard 7 girl)

I am a boy, a hardworking boy. I am in Standard 7. (15-year-old boy)

The young people also constructed their identities based upon their likes or dislikes, things they valued about themselves, their future hopes, and the sorts of friends they had. Two boys, aged 14 and 15, expressed great pride at their ability to perform well in school. The 14-year-old Standard 7 boy said he liked,

Being a boy…becoming Number One.

Other boys projected their identities into the future, suggesting high aspirations to become professionals such as pilots and managers.

Like the boys, some of the schoolgirls emphasised their ability to perform well at school as an important feature of their identities. For instance, Yasmin, a 14-year-old Standard 8 girl, included the experience of success in her self-description, saying she took pride,

When I become first in my class…

Most of the schoolgirls wanted to be perceived as 'good girls' who liked school and avoided bad things, such as fighting, stealing, and befriending boys. Being seen as 'good' was also important among the boys, most of whom said they did not want to become thieves or bandits due to a lack of education. Being helpful to people who were in trouble also featured prominently in the boys' accounts of their identities.

Even as the young people expressed concern about maintaining their family honour and avoiding behaviour that was considered 'shameful', they located the concepts of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour within a self-designed yardstick incorporating both traditional and modern norms. This contrasted sharply with the position of most parents, who considered only traditional qualities in defining what was good for their children.

Gender in the School Context

Popular girls and popular boys

Many of the respondents categorised themselves as 'popular', apparently because they possessed qualities that they considered exceptional. These included personal appearance, discipline, class performance and school responsibilities. At 14, Fatia was already portraying confidence in herself as a leader, declaring that she was the most popular girl in her school,

> **Because I am the head-girl. I tell them what is good and right… because I am the best.**

While it seemed important for many young people to be popular among their peers, a few claimed to be popular only among their own sex. As one 13-year-old Standard 5 girl stated:

> **I am only liked by girls because they are the ones we play with.**

Considering that most of the Garissa children were careful not to appear to be interested in relationships with the opposite sex, it is possible that some of them would have deliberately portrayed themselves as popular only with their own sex.

Social stereotypes about feminine beauty provided a common reference point as the girls constructed popular images of themselves in the context of heterosexual attraction. For example, one of the 16-year-old Standard 7 girls linked her 'fair complexion', good school performance and ambition to the perception of her popularity, particularly with the boys. She had the following to say during an interview:

> **I am popular… I am a brown girl. Everybody likes brown girls. Boys like us brown girls. I feel happy about it. I am a clever girl, number 3. I want to become a doctor because I want to treat the sick.**

This comment suggests that, even in a relatively closed culture such as that of Garissa's Somali community, attraction across the sexes was real in the lives of these girls and boys. As has already been observed, most of the girls had hopes and aspirations, which might not have reflected the traditional norms of girlhood in their community. However, the excerpt presented below demonstrates that not all the girls had positive images of themselves. Fatuma, a 15-year-old Standard 5 girl, expressed negative feelings about herself because she suspected that many of her peers did not like her:


Interviewer:	**Are you popular?**
Fatuma:	**No. I am only liked by my two friends; others don't like me. I feel bad. (Clicks her tongue, signifying disappointment and frustration.)**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Fatuma:	**I don't know. (Clicks her tongue again.)**
Interviewer:	**How do you tell that you are not liked?**
Fatuma:	**Because others just don't like me...**

Haji, a 14-year-old boy in Standard 6, highlighted several religious qualities that he claimed made him popular among his peers:

> **I am an Islamic official, organising secretary, Imam in the Mosque in the boarding section. I am also library, equipment and compound prefect.**

Most of these observations indicate that children's self-perceptions depend, to a large extent, upon how they think others perceive them. In this context, being helpful, respectful, trustworthy, honest, portraying 'good behaviour' and being religious were among the characteristics that they presumed made them popular at school and in the community.

While some of the boys claimed that there were no exceptionally unpopular boys or girls, it was clear that poor academic performance, as well as being undisciplined, uncooperative and disrespectful to teachers, were considered to be factors that resulted in boys being constructed as unpopular.

Popularity among girls was based upon their 'religiousness', high performance in religious classes, obedience, and disinterest in boys. Appearing to be interested in boys, being abusive or gossiping reduced their popularity both within and across the sexes.

The study findings show that, to a considerable degree, a blurring of the gender divide existed in the pupils' construction of popular forms of femininities and masculinities This suggests, quite significantly, that for the young Garissa pupils new forms of gender identities were emerging, which were relatively different from those inherited from their parents' generation. The observation that popular girlhood and boyhood shared more similarities than differences also reveals that these youngsters were transcending the stereotypes of gender boundaries in creating a more ideal humanity. Nonetheless, the policing of girls' sexuality seemed to remain unchallenged in the construction of feminine and masculine identities, thus positioning girls – and, by implication, women – as responsible for sexual

misdemeanours in the community's moral framework. This practice helped to perpetuate double standards in judging sexual behaviour, while continuing to disempower women and enhance male irresponsibility in sexual relationships.

Being Popular in the Community

When asked to describe the most popular and unpopular girls and boys in the community, playing football was mentioned repeatedly by the boys, while sexual discipline was considered paramount by the girls. These focuses reveal a major gender polarity in the community, which was not so explicit in school. The implication is that, as community life is relatively more traditional than the school culture, the boys and girls felt a need to construct identities that were commensurate with societal expectations of their gender identities and relations. In constructing their self-identities, the girls portrayed a strong consistency in their perceptions about the values associated with girlhood. For example, a 14-year-old Standard 7 girl illustrated this when she said,

> **I am popular because I am well behaved. I respect parents and teachers. I do what they ask.**

The girl's construction of herself could also fit in well with the ways that the boys were constructing themselves. However, a generational gap was evident in the adults' perceptions about gender, whereby they insisted on perpetuating clear boundaries in the construction of femininities and masculinities. The following comments from a male administrative chief clearly illustrate this gap, as well as the widespread pressure on girls' sexual morality:

> **As a Somali community, we follow our culture... fathers take care of the upbringing of boys. He advises them on how to be good boys, while holding Islamic virtues and that of the clan. Girls are brought up under the care of the mothers. Any disgrace brought by a daughter is blamed on the mother.**

In the same context, we note how women in the community tended to cling to traditional practices without any indication about how they were responding to changing lifestyles or possible changes in gender roles and relations. The following comment from a woman leader, Mama Saida, suggests that changing lifestyles are largely lamented by local women:

> **We used to pray our daily prayers and care for our animals and husbands.**

Emotions in Young People's Lives

When asked what made them happy or sad, there did not appear to be any major differences between the things that emotionally affected the girls and the boys. In their diaries, girls in particular identified travelling between home and school as raising considerable emotional anxieties. This concern was also raised in the individual interviews, which made the claims appear relatively consistent and credible.

Both boys and girls said that passing examinations, being given presents and being bought new clothes made them happy. Many boys and girls said that attaining a good position in class made them 'very happy', while failing in exams made them sad. In their diaries, the boys identified playing with friends and having the chance of living with their parents as some important things that made them happy. There were several factors that elicited sadness, such as a death in the family, accidents affecting relatives, and corporal punishment in the school or at home.

Notably, both verbal and written examples bore some reference to religious practices and beliefs as a source of happiness – indicating that Islam was intertwined in the daily lives of all the Garissa families. For instance, 15-year-old Standard 7 girl Zaituni linked some of her unhappiest moments with religious transgressions by her peers:

> **When I see boys and girls walking together… because it is not allowed by religion.**

Many of the out-of-school boys and girls located their emotions within the economic welfare of the family. For example, Ali, a 12-year-old boy, said he became very happy,

> **When a cow produced a female calf…**

However, drought elicited negative emotions from Ali, who said:

> **I am sad when there is drought, no food for people and grass for cows.**

An out-of-school girl connected her happy times with the presence of her parents at home – suggesting, perhaps, that they often travelled. She said she became sad "when I hear that a girl I know is pregnant", because of the often-cited reason of family shame. Interestingly, many of the boys presented themselves as experts about the sources of girls' fears – including the fear of pregnancy. One of them claimed this was due to the pain of childbirth, while a few boys suggested that girls were afraid to get married because they did not want to become pregnant. This construction of girlhood was subtly contrasted with boyhood, with issues of pregnancy and childbirth not considered a worry to any of the boys.

Exploring Gender Identities in Different Contexts

The Fluidity of Gender

As a way of exploring how young people created their identities in different social contexts, some of the girls and boys were interviewed again by different researchers. The results of these repeat interviews showed that many of the young participants presented themselves very differently to different researchers. Some of the girls and boys interviewed by a female and later by a male researcher responded differently to some questions, particularly those on personal or sensitive issues related to sexuality or relationships with the opposite sex.

It was clear that, during the interviews, children constructed themselves in ways that they deemed appropriate for them in relation to the gender and perceived cultural and religious background of the researchers. For instance, Muslim boys provided comparatively more normative responses to the Muslim researcher than they did to researchers whom they considered non-Muslim. One Standard 7 boy, 15-year-old Mohammed, revealed information to a male Muslim researcher about the existence of boy-girl friendships in the school. However, when interviewed by a non-Muslim researcher, he only outlined the norms regarding sexual relationships as prescribed in Islamic doctrines. He also told the Muslim researcher that there were boy-girl friendships on his estate, while withholding the same information from the non-Muslim. Mohammed told the Muslim researcher that he was popular because he was hardworking and religious, while he told the non-Muslim researcher that his popularity stemmed from secular factors such as being a class prefect and being clever academically. Mohammed's responses present a vivid indication of the fluid nature of gender as employed actively in different social contexts and relationships. He consciously rationalised and presented himself selectively to the two researchers, constructing himself in ways that he deemed appropriate and safe.

There was also some indication that respondents opened up much more easily to researchers of the same sex. For example, when Fatia, the 14-year-old Standard 7 girl, was interviewed by a female researcher and re-interviewed by a male researcher, she revealed dynamics of gender fluidity that were similar to Mohammed's. Fatia gave relatively more details about her background to the woman than to the man. In this context, it is likely that the girl constructed the female researcher as a person who could understand and perhaps empathise more easily than the male researcher. For example, to the male researcher, she described her mother merely as a hotelier in Garissa, while to the female researcher she added more detail, revealing that her mother was a divorcee who also worked in a kiosk. Asked to state what gender she preferred if given a chance to change, Fatia told both researchers that she would opt to remain a girl. However, she gave different reasons for her preference. To the male researcher, she said she wished to remain

A girl, because girls help mothers.

To the female researcher, however, Fatia explained her choice of girlhood differently, adding her opinion that,

Girls are good [but] boys are dirty.

Fatia's responses represented typical stereotypical constructions of girlhood and boyhood that the girls in Garissa were expected to internalise. Hence, her replies constitute model answers with regard to femininity and *vis-à-vis* masculinity within the local patriarchal setting. Notably, however, Fatia quite cleverly found it inappropriate to ridicule boys and describe them as 'dirty' to the male researcher, because this would have been inconsistent with the norm of gender relations in her culture. However, she found no problem in sharing this perception with the female researcher, with whom she identified through their shared femininity.

Below are some extracts from Fatia's interviews, demonstrating the different ways that she intricately constructed herself and girlhood with the different researchers:

Interview with the male researcher:


Interviewer:	**How many are you in your family?**
Fatia:	**Five children, one girl, two parents.**
Interviewer:	**What do your family members do?**
Fatia:	**Mother does hotel business in Garissa. Father is a farmer in Garissa.**
Interviewer:	**Are you popular?**
Fatia:	**All girls are equally popular.**
Interviewer:	**If you were allowed to choose your sex today, which sex would you prefer and why?**
Fatia:	**A girl, because girls help mothers. Boys do not help.**

Interview with the female researcher:


Interviewer:	**How many are you in your family?**
Fatia:	**We are five children. I am not the first. I am the third born. We are three boys and two girls.**
Interviewer:	**What do your family members do?**
Fatia:	**My father's alone. He is a farmer. He grows fruits and tomatoes. Mother divorced a year ago. She is in Garissa, working in a kiosk shop. She sends us money to buy clothes and shoes.**
Interviewer:	**Are you popular?**
Fatia:	**I am popular. I have good behaviour. I respect teachers and parents.**

Interviewer:	**If you were allowed to choose your sex today, which sex would you prefer and why?**
Fatia:	**A girl; a girl is good. Girls are better than boys because they are clean. Boys are dirty.**

It is important to point out that, as the majority of the responses in both interviews were largely the same, the responses could be said to have been credible and reliable. The variations in detail and positionings were not necessarily an attempt to be deceptive but rather a manifestation of Fatia's active constructions and expressions of different subjectivities in relation to other subjects. This is evidence of how individuals continually construct and reconstruct their identities in ways that they deem appropriate, reasonable and convincing.

Girls and boys as future women and men

Pupils were given the opportunity to write an essay on the topic, 'The person I would most like to be like.' This topic was chosen as a guide to facilitate their projection of their identities on a significant other, while constructing their identities into the future. Twelve pupils – six boys and six girls – participated in the exercise. Below is a tabulation of their projected identities:

The majority of the interviewees, rather than projecting their lives based upon particular personalities, actively constructed their identities as future subjects with agency. They portrayed themselves as potential professionals, with the majority of the girls visualising themselves as doctors and explaining that doctors helped people by treating them when they were sick. The girls and boys who chose teaching described the profession as one that would bring positive change to many children in the country.

Pupils' Projected Identities by Gender

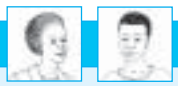
Preferred identity	Girls	Boys	Total
Doctor	3	2	5
Teacher	2	1	3
Pilot	-	1	1
Farmer	1	-	1
Transporter	-	1	1
President Moi	-	1	1

The only pupil who identified with a significant other chose Daniel arap Moi, then the President of Kenya, whom he admired because of his perceived popularity in the country. Like the president, the boy rationalised that he would enjoy travelling to different places and meeting different people.

From this exercise, it is clear that the Garissa children, irrespective of their gender, wished to be successful citizens with high status careers. The motive of helping others in their projected identities suggests that compassion formed part of their idealised identities.

Forming Peer Relationships

A variety of different relationships existed between school children of the same and different sexes, their parents and teachers. However, as observed in the preceding sub-sections, close relationships between girls and boys, regardless of their nature, were prohibited by Somali culture. However, children of the same gender appeared to relate well, as they shared their problems, played and socialised together. Considerable emphasis was placed upon abstinence from premarital sex, as a strategy for upholding one's family honour. Two adult participants, Mama Leila and a male elder, explained this as follows:




Mama Leila: **The relationship between boys and girls in our community is good. No mixing of sexes. The situation is strict.**

Male elder: **We warn our boys not to associate [sexually] with girls. This can bring shame, and make a family be fined.**

By contrast, most of the girls and boys described the relationship across the sexes as 'good'. However, they were eager to defend traditional norms governing such relationships, and often referred to the religious doctrines and regulations that proscribed sexual relationships. When asked to comment on how young people interpreted relationships with the opposite sex, Abdi, a 14-year-old Standard 7 boy, seemed eager to explain the consequences of engaging in such relationships:


Interviewer: **How is the relationship between boys and girls?**

Abdi: **Boys and girls… no relationships. Parents of girls beat them if they go with boys.**

Interviewer: **Why is that so?**

Abdi: **Parents don't like them to walk together…**

Another Standard 7 boy declared,

> **I don't want to do sexual intercourse because of dangerous diseases, and also religion does not allow it.**

Teachers who were interviewed claimed that there were no sexual or intimate relationships between pupils in the primary school, and that any relationships were based purely upon academic interests such as sharing books, pens, and other items associated with learning.

Boyhood and Comradeship

The majority of the boys were of the view that they related well and were friendly with other boys. Referring to his male counterparts, Abdi, the Standard 7 boy, announced that, "They love one another." During the fieldwork, researchers observed a strong sense of comradeship between the boys, confirming the claims made during the interviews. This was encapsulated in the following description by a 16-year-old Standard 8 boy, who said:

Boys and boys work together, sit together, eat together, [and] fight at times.

Later on in the same interview, the boy dismissed such fights as insignificant because, apparently, they constituted minor disagreements that did not require any intervention by the teachers. A male teacher corroborated this sense of comradeship, saying that most of his male pupils appeared happy about the way they related and played together.

Girls' Relationships with Boys

When girls were asked to state how boys and girls related in the Garissa school, the initial response was that of surprise that such a question could even be asked. One 15-year-old girl retorted by saying:

They [girls and boys] don't relate except for academic purposes.

Considering the policing of female sexuality and the pressure placed upon Somali girls to uphold sexual morality and safeguarded their family honour, their prompt defence of their dignity was understandable. To these girls, even the mere suggestion that they did not observe sexual segregation could have been interpreted as questioning their fidelity.

After realising that relationships between the sexes were a very sensitive area, the researchers employed considerable caution in asking different questions and explaining that they wanted only to know about the *possibility* of friendships between boys and girls. One girl, Leila, however, dismissed the very idea of friendships between girls and boys, claiming that boys were generally abusive to girls. The following excerpt illustrates her sentiments:


Interviewer: **What can you say about the relationship between boys and girls in school?**

Leila: **They abuse girls.**

Interviewer: **Can you give examples?**

Leila: ***Wewe ni bibi yangu*** **[You are my wife].**

Interviewer: **When and why do the boys abuse girls?**

Leila: **When I don't know certain subjects [ie. am unable to answer a question], some of the boys abuse girls. They make dirty jokes…**

Interviewer: **What do the girls do about it?**

Leila: **Girls get annoyed and tell madam who then tells the headmaster.**

Interviewer: **Then what happens?**

Leila: **They are beaten on parade.**

It appears that boys often made fun of girls when they had difficulties with their schoolwork. They also insulted the girls, labelling them as their 'wives'. Such labels apparently upset many of the girls, who believed that they might be interpreted as implying that the girls were actually engaging in sexual relations with the boys. The fact that there were relatively few girls in the school meant that they were sometimes regarded as pioneering 'heroines' – and it was understandable that they were sensitive to accusations that could be used to construe them in a shameful way.

When the girls were asked to describe the qualities that they would look for in a friend of the opposite sex, the interviewees were prompt in reminding the researchers that, in their community, it was taboo to have boyfriends or girlfriends. They reiterated that boys and girls were expected to stay separate until they were married – and instead chose to list their best female friends.

Despite their illicit nature, however, several of the girls implied that 'friendships' between girls and boys did exist at the school. Yasmin, a 14-year-old Standard 8 girl, narrated an incident about some of her girlfriends who, when their mothers left them in charge of the family hotel one night, invited their boyfriends to join them. However, even with such

allegations, none of the interviewees themselves admitted to having a boyfriend. As one 15-year-old girl put it:

> **I don't want it [a relationship]. It is against our religion. If religion said it is good, I shall have it.**

While many pupils cited religion as the most common control mechanism for heterosexual relationships between young people, others, such as 14-year-old Ali in the excerpt below, tied their lack of relationships to the lack of 'modernity' among fellow pupils:


Interviewer:	**Are you involved in a boy-girl friendship?**
Ali:	**No.**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Ali:	**Because our school-girls are traditional and bush girls.**

It would appear that, irrespective of the religious policing of boy-girl relationships, some of the pupils were interested in having intimate friends of the opposite sex – but were apprehensive of the social consequences. This also seemed to affect their readiness to discuss openly the qualities that they would seek in friends of the opposite sex. However, some of the boys admitted that they would be interested in establishing relationships with girls who were educated, disciplined, obedient and knowledgeable. The few girls who agreed to discuss this issue said they preferred boys who were friendly, well behaved and talked about 'nice things'. Most of the girls, however, did not even want to hear of the idea of associating with boys.

Female Solidarity

Boys talking about girls

All of the boys said that girls related well among themselves and that some of them were often seen working together, sitting together, and walking home together at the end of the school day.

Girls talking about girls

Girls interpreted the relationships among them as good, mainly because they did their homework and other school assignments together. During the study, the researchers observed considerable closeness among the girls, suggesting a solidarity akin to the comradeship observed among the boys. Fatuma, a 16-year-old Standard 7 girl, explained this girl-to-girl relationship as follows:

> **They do not quarrel with each other, they like one another. They do not backbite each other.**

Relationships between Pupils and Teachers

Boys' Relationships with their Female Teacher

The school had only one female teacher, whose relationship with her pupils was generally described as positive and helpful. However, many of the boys were eager to clarify that their relationship with the teacher was purely professional, based upon schoolwork and their respect for her. They saw her as more close to the girls, who during their interviews confirmed this. Some of the boys even claimed that they felt shy in this teacher's presence.

The boys said that the female teacher generally helped the girls more than she did the boys. She was said to always motivate the girls to do better in school and outdo the boys. Abdi, a 15-year-old Standard 7 boy, alleged that,

> **She encourages the girls to work hard to defeat boys.**

Apart from encouraging the girls to complete their schooling and seek better life chances, one Standard 7 boy observed that the female teacher had the responsibility of inspecting the girls' cleanliness and grooming. Generally, many of the boys were of the view that this teacher was 'psyching up' the girls to fight for their education, in order to attain a better future for themselves and possibly their families.

Girls' Relationships with their Female Teacher

For their part, the girls confirmed that their relationship with the female teacher was good, mainly because they perceived her as a mentor to them and something of a mother figure. They said that she always urged them to perform well in school, and also encouraged them to avoid sexual relations with boys. An interview with Fatia, the 14-year-old Standard 7 girl, captured this view:

Interviewer:	**What can you say about the relationship between girls and the female teacher?**
Fatia:	**She talks to us.**
Interviewer:	**What does she say?**
Fatia:	**Be good girls. *Msituweke chini. Msicheze. Msicheze na mvulana msipate ugonjwa wa ukimwi*. ('Be good girls. Do not let us down. Don't play with boys, as you may get AIDS.)**

The role of the female teacher reflects the view that education remains a clearly gendered process at this school. In this context, we see the school reproducing gender values and perpetuating gender boundaries in society through its pupil-teacher relationships. Rationally,

the schoolgirls perceive the female teacher as their key source of guidance, and thus seek different sorts of information from her. They also appear to have confidence in her to take care of their needs. When the boys harass them, the female teacher provides them with refuge. Ngina, a 16-year-old Standard 7 girl, summed up the girls' relationship with the female teacher:

> **She is like our mother. She tells us everything… to be clean every day. She checks our hair.**

Sakina expressed affection for the teacher as she spoke passionately about her. She also expressed disgust at the way that boys talked disparagingly about her, mocking her physical features:

Sakina: **Boys backbite her when she is out. They say… she looks like she is as tall as a giraffe. They like short women.**

Interviewer: **What do you feel about these comments?**

Sakina: **I feel angry because they are abusing our madam. I tell them that it is bad.**

Interviewer: **What do the boys say?**

Sakina: **They say, 'don't tell us anything.'**

Pupils' Relationships with their Male Teachers

The boys reported that they had a good relationship with the male teachers, whom they described as helpful in schoolwork and joining them to play football. Observations revealed that the boys were generally very obedient to the teachers. One of the boys summarised the relationship by asserting that they and their male teachers understood one another well. The girls confirmed that boys, more than the girls, were closer to the male teachers.

Male teachers and girl pupils

- Boys perceived the relationship between male teachers and girls to be a useful one, because the teachers helped girls with their studies. They pointed out that the male teachers and girls were bound to have mutual respect for each other, as this was required by the Somali culture.

The girls, however, said that, while their relationship with the male teachers was good, it existed only for academic matters. Some of the girls insisted that there was no relationship at all between them and the male teachers – also no doubt because they thought that this could be misconstrued as referring to unprofessional or even sexual relationships.

Although the relationship between pupils and male teachers was considered favourable, a few girls did not seem free with these teachers – perhaps also for fear of appearing to be transgressing religious and cultural behaviour codes. One of the male teachers reported that 'social policing' ensured that men and boys remained segregated from women and girls in all communal functions, including school life.

During discussions with the teachers, the male teachers said they did not relate easily with female pupils lest the parents suspected them of luring their daughters into sexual relationships. Nevertheless, despite the strict policing of gender relations, members of the predominantly male staff claimed that they were duty bound to counsel and guide both the male and female pupils without discrimination.

Relationships with Parents

The boys and girls who took part in the study described their relationships with both their parents as positive. Although they did not give concrete examples about the nature of these relationships, they stressed that they were 'good'.

Fathers and sons

The interviews revealed that the boys who had fathers were relaxed and happy to talk about their relationships with them. Many of them expressed a belief that fathers loved their sons more than they loved their daughters. Ahmed, a 14-year-old Standard 8 boy, reported that boys and fathers bonded well because they,

> **Work together, talk to each other, go to the farm together, and tell each other stories.**

The girls confirmed the boys' views about fathers being closer to their sons than to their daughters. This, they said, was in keeping with the gendered cultural traditions that require fathers and big brothers to educate and counsel their young sons and brothers. Mothers, on the other hand, were expected to focus on their daughters, as one of the women leaders, Mama Leila, explained:

> **Traditionally, women are supposed to be submissive and do all that traditional customs expect of a woman. The men have their roles in decision making and making the way forward for the family.**

Fathers and daughters

The general impression from the interviews was that boys and girls thought that fathers, as the providers of school fees and other basic needs, had to establish amicable relationships with their daughters. Most boys, nonetheless, argued that father-daughter relationships lacked the same emotional attachment as father-son relationships.

For their part, most girls perceived their relationship with their fathers as reasonably good – although two girls said they rarely talked with their fathers, and preferred the company of their mothers. *This was compatible with our more general findings that,* in the Garissa community, boys were relatively more valued by their fathers, who saw girls as 'wives in waiting' who were bound to leave the family home for that of their future husbands.

Mothers and sons

Close to a 'mirror image' of the father-daughter relationships, boys portrayed their relationships with their mothers as exclusively parental, and 'good' as long as the boys remained obedient. As a 14-year-old boy in Standard 8 explained,

> **Mothers tell boys to do what is required, what is right like obeying, learning, helping parents at home when they are free.**

Yet again, the girls' perceptions echoed those of the boys in affirming that the relationships between mothers and sons were founded on the requirements of parenting. This confirms the strict gendering of socialisation processes among Garissa's Somali families – a characteristic that appears to be strongly resistant to external influence.

Mothers and daughters

Boys perceived the relationship between mothers and daughters as necessarily close because, as their culture dictated, mothers needed to advise girls on personal issues regarding sexuality, womanhood, marriage and family. As 14-year-old Haji pointed out,

> **Mothers and girls like each other. Most mothers like their girls because they teach them how to stay with future husbands, as boys are taught how to live by their fathers.**

What emerged clearly from the boys' interviews was their perception that mothers were obliged to educate and prepare their daughters for marriage and domesticity, while the fathers' main role was that of preparing sons for the world of work that would enable them to provide for their families.

Because of the physical, psychological and emotional positioning of daughters and their mothers, it was inevitable that the two generations of women bonded more closely, as reported by several interviewees. However, it was not clear whether the boys enjoyed a positioning with their fathers that was equivalent to that of the mothers and daughters, particularly in terms of emotional bonding.

Sex and Sexuality

Being Girls and Being Boys

It seemed that all the girl and boy respondents were content with their gender positioning. This became clear when the young participants were asked to choose whether they would prefer to

be a boy or a girl. All the boys stated categorically that they would prefer to remain boys. Only two of the girls said that, given the chance, they would opt to become boys.

Girls choosing girlhood

The girls who preferred their gender provided various reasons, many of which were based on the stereotype of being helpful and caring. The following were among their statements:

> **Girls have more chances than boys... girls are only left to cook and have more time to rest. (14-year-old girl in Standard 8)**
>
> **Girls stay at home and help their parents; they can't go alone for safaris because of *sharia*. (16 year old, Standard 7)**
>
> **Girls are better than boys because they are clean. Boys are dirty. (14 year old, Standard 7)**
>
> **I like being a girl. I don't regret being a girl. (17 year old)**
>
> **Girls help parents in their work. It is good. (16 year old)**

Interestingly, the two girls who said they would prefer to become boys were both aged 13 and in Standard 5. Both these girls expressed anxiety about the practice of removing girls from their families after marriage and relocating them to the bridegroom's home and family. One of the girls complained that,

> **A girl gets married while a boy stays at home when married.**

By dissenting from the dominant female position and choosing boyhood over their own genders, the two girls were, in effect, challenging the basis of the apparent 'voicelessness' and disempowerment of Somali girls in relationships and marriage. It is commonplace for older polygamous men in this community to marry adolescent brides whom they can dominate while they are located away from their biological families. Instructively, it seems unlikely that these girls would have dared to express themselves in the way they did outside the context of such non-judgmental research. The hopes and aspirations to become more than mere wives, housekeepers and child-bearers are often shattered by early marriage. Importantly for this study, the outspokenness of the two girls reveals that young people will actively contest the social construction of gender, even when the space in which to do so is very limited. The girls' views pose a challenge to the traditional thinking in the Garissa community that positions women as passive beings in social life.

Boys choosing boyhood

All the boys preferred their own gender, citing the freedoms they enjoyed as men-to-be, physical strength and other masculine qualities:

> **If I am a girl, I can be divorced. As a boy, I am free to do everything I like. (15 year old)**

Because female is the one who gets pregnant and carries a baby for nine months. (15 year old, Standard 7)

Male, because if you have sex you can get pregnant, one who suffers is the female. I can fight for my community; girls do not fight for their community. (14 year old, Standard 6)

Girls get pregnant. Boys are stronger. (15 year old)

A boy can always go where he wants. The girl is always there. She is not allowed to go outside home. (14 year old, Standard 8)

These statements from the boys' interview have serious implications about how the community constructed femininity, masculinity and female sexuality. Clearly, the boys perceived women and girls to be physically weak, irresponsible, and condemned to the hardships of pregnancy and motherhood. None of the boys positioned manhood within the context of the home, where numerous monotonous chores are assigned to women and girls. Instead, boyhood was positioned away from home and alongside manhood in the bliss of 'freedom' of movement and action. This construction of masculinities clearly boosted the self-image, determination and direction of the boys *vis-à-vis* the girls.

The out-of-school boys and girls also opted for their own sex and gender identities and resisted the idea of a possible 'sex swap'. Although the boys in this category did not give reasons similar to those of their counterparts in school, it was clear that the issue of male power over the female was a key reason why boyhood was important to them. The boys were keen to present themselves as 'men in waiting', who would eventually inherit the power of the father in a patriarchal system. Ahmed, a 14-year-old boy, was categorical about his preference for boyhood, saying:

I would prefer to remain male because I want to make decisions like other men. Women are problematic...

From the findings, the preferred gender identity seemed to match the cultural stereotypes that legitimated the children's choices. Again, only a couple of girls were explicitly critical about the unequal power relations that obviously empowered the boy-child as a future decision-maker, provider and family head. Many of the girls did not challenge their disadvantaged positions – probably because they wished to portray themselves as true and loyal female members of their communities and families. The boys seemed to have no reason to complain about the privileges accorded to their sex.

Sexuality Education

Field observations and interviews reveal a general lack of knowledge on sexuality among the in and out-of-school children in the Garissa community. Children participating in the

focus group discussions confirmed that their parents never discussed sex and sexuality matters with them. Most of them said they obtained information on their own or through their peers. In a situation like this, the possibility of being misinformed or misdirected cannot be ruled out. One of the participating parents explained that, when her children matured sexually, she discussed their body changes and sexual development with them at home. However, according to many parents, especially the fathers, only a few parents taught their children about sexual matters. Instead, most parents expected their children to learn such things on their own or from their peers.

Because of the gendered scenario in this community, it is reasonable that some of the teachers were not convinced that parents taught their children about sex and sexuality effectively. Several teachers stressed the need to use the school as a venue for the teaching of sexuality education and reproductive health issues to both boys and girls.
The onset of adolescence not only raised anxiety among young people, but also among their parents – many of whom were more worried about their pubescent daughters than their sons. Some of the parents confessed to 'marrying off' adolescent girls for fear of shaming the family should the girl become pregnant while she was still unmarried. One father was uncontrite about this:

Immediately I see maturity in them, I marry them off.

The father went on to say that he was worried about his 18-year-old daughter, who he confessed that he wanted to marry off as soon as possible.

The discussions with parents revealed an awareness of the need to educate their children on some of the consequences of sexual maturation, although they clearly did not seem to know how to tackle this process with sons and daughters who were at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. Many of the parents said that each family was responsible for educating its children on sexuality matters – even though they conceded that they hardly ever discussed such matters with their children. The local chief clarified that parents could not assume the role of sexuality educators, because culturally sexuality was considered a shameful topic that should not be discussed between children and parents. Fear of pregnancy and other risks associated with sexual activities was a common phenomenon among the Garissa families. However, girls and parents seemed more concerned about girls not getting pregnant. Therefore, the main focus on girls' sexuality was to ensure that they did not become pregnant until after marriage. In this context, the school was perceived as a risky environment for girls, as it exposed them to boys and men away from the surveillance of parents and community leaders. This has resulted in some parents withdrawing their pubescent daughters from school.
While parents admitted that they had a responsibility to work with teachers and health workers to educate young people on matters of sexuality and reproductive health, they also confessed that they lacked the confidence to do this effectively. Many of the children confirmed the inadequacy and unwillingness of their parents to provide sexuality education.

Sources and Content of Sexuality Education

Most of the boys reported that they had received some sexuality education from their fathers, grandparents, peers, older boys, teachers or local chiefs. As was expected of Somali traditions, the girls said they received sexuality education mainly from their mothers and female peers. The out-of-school children, as well as a few who were in school, claimed they had not received any sexuality education and were therefore largely ignorant of sexual health issues.

Although the process of providing sexuality education to young people was clearly gendered, the messages contained for both boys and girls tended to gravitate towards the avoidance of sexual relationships – and rarely on the development and possibilities of non-sexual friendships.

Sexuality education for boys

The following are some of the sexuality-related lessons that boys said they had learned from their parents and other duty bearers outside school:

- **Avoid sex with girls, which is a shame and can bring diseases (14 year old)**
- **Sex is bad manners or habits; you should not have a girlfriend (15 year old)**
- **Do not choose girls who are sexy because they may have diseases (14 year old, Standard 6)**
- **How to protect ourselves from AIDS (14 year old, Standard 7)**
- Not to have sex, to have responsible behaviour.

Within the school, boys said they had learned the following:

- **AIDS is a serious disease and has no cure (15 year old, Standard 6)**
- **Girls can bring diseases to us (14 year old, Standard 7)**
- **Not to have sex because of HIV/AIDS (13 year old, Standard 7)**
- **There is AIDS and you can die from it (15 year old).**

These comments show how girls are usually constructed negatively as disease carriers and spreaders of HIV, while boys are portrayed as potential victims. Strikingly, the girls did not appear to receive lessons that constructed boys in such a negative light. These double standards in the provision of sexuality education are likely to stigmatise girls in an era when both genders require effective life skills to avoid HIV/AIDS.

Sexuality education for girls

The following statements exemplify how differently mothers educate their daughters about sexuality, without even suggesting that they could be infected with HIV. It is noteworthy that the lessons also tie girls' sexuality to the onset of puberty:

- **Not to walk with the boys (16 year old)**
- **They tell me not to have sex because I may end up pregnant (15 year old)**
- **My mother told me about menstruation and she tells me about boys (16 year old, Standard 7)**
- **Behave well and avoid evil things (16 year old, out of school).**

From these comments, it is clear that most of the education given was in the form of warnings against sexual relationships, impressing upon the girls that relationships between the sexes were inevitably sexual and therefore immoral. The absence of explanations or elaborations about desires of young people, how to respond to such desires, the need for companionship, fears and hopes, only serves to polarise the two genders and to create anxieties in young people whenever they feel attracted to a member of the opposite sex.

Gaps and Constraints in Sexuality Education

Even when given the opportunity, most of the boys and girls did not ask the researchers any questions related to sexuality. Only a few of the boys and the girls raised questions, to which the researchers attempted to respond as honestly as they could. From the questions that were asked, it was clear that boys wanted more information related to HIV infection and how it could be avoided. Girls asked questions about menstruation and its implications for sexual intercourse.

The researchers were, however, encouraged that young people from this relatively closed community had developed enough confidence to ask questions that were considered culturally sensitive. Many of the girls said they could only ask their mothers such questions, but lamented that in most cases their mothers were unable to discuss such matters exhaustively. This confirms the value of using gender sensitive, young person centred methods in conducting this kind of qualitative research.

HIV/AIDS Issues and Education

Awareness and Knowledge

The majority of the participants exhibited reasonable levels of awareness and knowledge about HIV and AIDS, with many of them identifying sexual intercourse as the main mode of HIV transmission. Some of the participants also mentioned other modes of transmission, such as injections with contaminated needles, the sharing of hypodermic needles, the transfusion of contaminated blood, and wife inheritance. In a community in which the

delivery of babies at home is commonplace, it is noteworthy that at least the traditional birth attendants appeared to be well educated about HIV/AIDS transmission.

Only a few misconceptions about AIDS emerged during the interviews with boys and girls, indicating the reasonable success of AIDS awareness activities in school and the community. Among the out-of-school children, however, one of the boys from an isolated *bula* (village) believed that dogs were responsible for spreading AIDS, possibly through biting the victims. Such perceptions raise serious questions about the scope of AIDS awareness campaigns and whether they are reaching the relatively remote areas where Somali pastoralists graze their animals.

Some of the parents also displayed a lack of basic knowledge about HIV/AIDS. One mother, for example, said HIV could be transmitted through the sharing of cigarettes and chewing of *miraa*. Another parent believed that untreated gonorrhoea could transform itself into AIDS. She added that HIV infections emanated from hospitals through the transfusion of infected blood – a belief founded on the common myth that some doctors deliberately contaminated blood with the virus. Another myth that raised concern was that HIV/AIDS had come from *wazungu* ('white people') and only affected townsfolk.

Gender Identities, Relationships and HIV/AIDS

Self perceptions of girls and boys could have an influence on the ways that young people relate with the opposite sex, making them more or less vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections and HIV infection. Physical appearance, especially for girls, seemed to enhance perceptions of sexual attractiveness to boys and men. Since the men of the community were expected to initiate sexual relations and to control female sexuality through community policing of sexual and gender relations, girls who beautified themselves were accused of attempting to sexually entice men and boys. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with young people making themselves sexually attractive, the men and boys took advantage of cultural expectations of female sexual docility to sexualise, abuse and harass those girls who were perceived to be expressing themselves as sexually attractive. In addition, while concern was expressed about girls looking attractive to men, nothing was ever said against boys who presented themselves attractively to girls.

These double standards in the construction of young people's identities and their expressions of sexuality clearly make girls more vulnerable to male abuse, both physically and psychologically. Considering that several incidences were reported of young people having girlfriends and boyfriends, the need for and importance of life skills education with a special focus on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health cannot be overemphasised.

Sexual Maturation and Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

Fears were expressed by both children and parents that the onset of puberty was linked to irresistible sexual urges, which were considered 'bad' for young people. A sexual drive

was invariably seen as a 'bad thing', because it could result in sexual activity that predisposed boys and girls to HIV/AIDS, not to mention the possibility of pregnancy. Many of the boys in the study thought that maturing sexually necessarily pushed people into sexual relationships. Young people logically linked the fear of AIDS with the fear of sex, prompting comments such as those from one 15-year-old Standard 7 boy, who worried that,

> **Boys [as they mature sexually] start looking for women and can get infected.**

A few children, however, offered divergent views, with some rationalising that young people were capable of protecting themselves from HIV by exercising sexual abstinence. This argument portrays considerable rationality by young people, who could clearly benefit from appropriate life skills and AIDS education. For example, Haji, a 14-year-old Standard 6 boy, seemed sure about being able to protect himself, saying that he would definitely "keep away from sex". Young people's awareness about the role of abstention as a key method of avoiding HIV and STI infection also illustrated the relative success of recent awareness campaigns in the district.

Tradition and Modernity and HIV/AIDS

Effects of tradition on HIV/AIDS

When asked to explain how tradition and modernity made young people vulnerable to STIs or HIV/AIDS, boys and girls both in and out of school singled out the early marriage of young girls to older men who were often polygamous and therefore exposed to multiple sex partners. Fatia, a 14-year-old Standard 7 girl, observed that girls did not enjoy being children or adolescents because,

> **Girls are married off even before reaching 20 years.**

One of the boys cited widow inheritance as a traditional practice that exposed both the bride and groom to HIV infection, arguing that the widowed partner may bring HIV infection into the new relationship, infecting the new partner and possibly the offspring of the marriage.

Circumcision was also identified as being detrimental to the sexual and reproductive health of both girls and boys. Apparently, the methods used to perform female genital incisions are unhygienic and the wounds can result in scarring that poses devastating health problems during childbirth. According to one female key informant, the practice of girls' circumcision also exposes initiates to infections because thorns are used to stitch together the cut areas.

The interviewees also revealed that traditional Somali houses do not have secure locking systems, and thus presented a security risk to women who lived alone. According to one elderly female informant, men would often walk into such houses at night and harass or rape girls and women, putting them at risk of HIV or STIs. Apparently, this behaviour

existed unchallenged, even with the so-called sexual sanctions that are supposed to protect the sexual dignity of women (see section on 'Socio-sexual control mechanisms').

Effects of modernity on HIV/AIDS

Findings show that boys, more than girls, tended to criticise modern lifestyles that did not denounce relationships between the sexes. Boys, both in and out of school, saw modernity as bound to liberalise sexual restrictions in the community, thus making children more vulnerable to HIV infection. This view is understandable in the context of urbanisation, which tends to modernise traditional lifestyles, making them more open and independent and less restrictive. For example, several schoolboys cited the emergence of video centres and cinemas where children could watch movies with a sexual content behind their parents' backs. They also claimed that modern boys and girls were more likely to have sexual relationships with girlfriends and boyfriends – contrary to traditional expectations that discourage such liaisons.

Like their in-school counterparts, out-of-school boys perceived modernity as responsible for increasing young people's exposure to HIV/AIDS. They generally condemned the urban way of life, which they saw as facilitating illicit sexual relations. As Ahmed, a 14-year-old boy, observed:

Modernity makes people stay in town and practice *zinaa* (illegal sex).

Another out-of-school boy, aged 12 years, believed that modern values made women more available to men for sexual intercourse:

Women are plenty everywhere (ready to engage in sexual activities).

Instructively, not all the study subjects felt that modernity and/or tradition were responsible for the spread of AIDS. For example, one 15-year-old Standard 6 girl said that neither of the two lifestyles had any effect on her life as a sexual being, adding that vulnerability to HIV infection was a matter of individual attitudes. Declaring that she was "careful and God-fearing," the girl stressed that religious faith and practice were the only effective ways of avoiding AIDS.

Considering that female circumcision is traditionally designed to reduce a woman's libido, it is ironic that some circumcised girls reportedly venture into sexual activity – presumably because the initiation marks their transition to adulthood, which provides a licence to engage in a life of sexual intimacy. Such early engagement in sexual activity could be a reflection of a combination of complex and conflicting positionings, as defined by the traditional transition into adulthood, whereby only adults are expected to engage in sexual intercourse. In this context, one female informant pointed out that because sexually active circumcised girls inevitably lose their virginity, their mothers often arrange for them to be re-stitched in case they eventually found a suitor who wished to marry them. The re-stitching helped to dupe the bridegroom into believing his bride to be a virgin, thus, tactfully but fraudulently, averting possible scandal befalling the girl's family. Undoubtedly,

as much as this façade helped in saving face for the girl and her family, it also exposed such girls and their unsuspecting husbands to a greater risk of STIs and HIV/AIDS.

According to one of the teachers, modernity has contributed to the demystification of sex as a taboo topic through modern schooling and AIDS awareness campaigns. The teacher argued that modernity had also exposed the pupils to a lot of information and knowledge that was useful in their present and future lives as healthy sexual beings. In this view, modernity emerges as responding to the values of traditionalism but using different approaches that seek to promote sexual health and giving people information that enables them to take better charge of their lives. This view, however, did not appeal to some of the other teachers, who argued that both modernity and tradition had exposed their pupils to greater risks of contracting HIV. According to these teachers, the modern way of female dressing was sexually provocative, and encouraged men and boys to rape women and girls. Pornographic movies that were sometimes screened in video kiosks were also said to be responsible for the 'sexual awakening' of young people, who were then tempted to engage in sexual relations.

Strategies to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS

Most boys and girls presented themselves as active agents whose actions could help to reduce their exposure to HIV/AIDS. They seemed to agree that both boys and girls were capable of abstaining from sex at an early age. Some boys and girls recommended that they avoid sex while others talked of delaying sex until marriage as viable alternatives that would help them to avoid HIV infection. Some of the girls even suggested extreme measures, such as avoiding sharing clothes. Boys said that, apart from abstaining from sex, they could reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS by:

- **Having one faithful partner (15 year old Standard 8 boy)**
- **Using condoms (14 year old, Standard 6)**
- **Discussing and knowing how to protect ourselves (13 year old, Standard 6).**

Clearly, the above expressions are a reflection of the lessons on the 'ABCD' of HIV/AIDS, which emphasise Abstinence, Being faithful, Condom use, and Discussing HIV/AIDS. The fact that girls were not as elaborate as boys on this matter may be indicative of their shyness, or the fact that boys were relatively more eager to discuss their knowledge and awareness with the researchers.

Peers who were out-of-school also expressed the view that boys and girls could avoid sex as a way of reducing their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. They also mentioned avoiding sharing razor blades, needles and ear-piercing instruments, which was apparently quite commonplace among them. Without condemning the tradition of circumcision, the out-of-school children recommended that clean instruments be used during the circumcision of boys and girls.

In what seemed to be an attempt to control girls' sexuality, some of the out-of-school boys recommended that girls be punished for walking with 'bad' (sexually active) girls, who could presumably encourage them to engage in sexual relations. The implication here was that peer pressure could predispose girls to sexual activities and HIV infection.

Girls also spoke positively about the role of education in empowering young people to take control of their sexual health. A 16-year-old out-of-school girl claimed that lack of education had deprived her of chances to acquire greater knowledge about HIV/AIDS and the means of avoiding infection. She lamented her situation, saying:

> **I am not educated. I cannot read so I don't know how to eliminate it (AIDS).**

One 13-year-old girl alleged that boys were responsible for initiating sexual relations and, by implication, for spreading HIV and other STIs. This girl had a clear message that,

> **Boys should use their heads and avoid sex.**

According to one of the female parents, young people should be screened for HIV before marriage and women should be infibulated in order to control their libido. Apparently, this parent was the village 'infibulator', who expressed concern that uncircumcised girls in town demonstrated loose morals and were much more likely to be infected with HIV. She even claimed that women who had not been infibulated were unhygienic, insisting that infibulation was a necessity in "calming down the sexual urge of girls." However, the possibility that this woman was also advertising her trade for her own gain cannot be ignored.

The issue of segregating HIV-positive people from the rest of society was another recommendation that several parents made. One mother expressed the view that in order to control the spread of HIV/AIDS, anyone diagnosed with a venereal disease should be,

> **Arrested and excluded from the rest of the community, and let us tell our children to avoid premarital sex…**

During their discussions, the parents and community leaders proposed various ways of preventing the spread of STIs, HIV and AIDS, which included:

- Avoiding premarital sex;
- Intensifying the provision of information, education and communication materials geared towards positive behaviour change;
- Generating greater information on sexuality and HIV/AIDS to be provided during guidance and counselling classes;
- Infibulating girls as required by tradition in order to control their sexual desire.

Surprisingly, infibulation was considered to be a viable solution, despite the clear sexual health dangers that it presents to girls and women. Despite linking polygamy and wife inheritance to the spread of HIV/AIDS, it was also noteworthy that the community did

not deem it appropriate to include their cessation on their list of recommendations. This reveals the community's continuing concern to manage the sexual lives of its women, while allowing its men to engage in wife inheritance and polygamy.

Tradition, Modernity and Education

All the boys and girls who took part in the study perceived formal education and schooling as processes that helped them to modernise. Accordingly, all the participating schoolgirls and boys described themselves as 'modern'. Many of them also said that schooling helped them become more aware of what was happening in the world, thus increasing their general knowledge. However, concerns were also raised that, despite our arrival in the 21st century, only 18% of the school's pupil population were girls. By implication, the majority of girls in the community were being denied an equal opportunity with their male peers to participate in the process of modernisation through education.

Furthermore, both boys and girls criticised the traditional practice of marrying off adolescent girls, saying that it deprived these girls of the opportunity to pursue a formal education. Because such girls were usually married to elderly men, major problems between the couples often ensued, resulting in the divorce of young brides without the education to become self-sufficient. Such divorces were usually detrimental to the emotional wellbeing of these girls, whose only prospect was often to get married again to another older man – thus entrapping her in a vicious cycle of sexual and labour exploitation. Undoubtedly, such divorced girls, most of whom had little or no education, were likely to encounter great difficulties in surviving on their own, both socially and economically.
Because of their tendency to regard boys as a better 'investment' than girls, many parents tended to send the former and not the latter to school. Consequently, girls' education in Garissa remains low in terms of access, enrolment, retention, performance and transition rates. One of the parents admitted that she had withdrawn her daughter from school because boys harassed her by touching her breasts and sending her love letters. She explained that,

> **In fear of shame to the family status, I had to discontinue her attending school.**

Young people talking about sexuality and education
When the young people were asked to explain how sexual maturation affected their learning, the boys claimed that maturing sexually often made them start thinking about girls. This was even to the detriment of their studies, as a 14-year-old Standard 8 boy claimed:

> **You cannot learn, you will just be thinking about girls.**

The boys also thought that girls suffered reduced concentration at school, because of the bodily changes they were going through. One 15-year-old Standard 7 boy also believed that,

Girls are affected in that they cannot come to class when they have their monthly periods.

Many of the girls seemed to agree with the boys' perception about how puberty affected them. They confessed that they encountered difficulties in concentrating at school because of a combination of biological, social, physical and emotional changes. One 16-year-old Standard 8 girl agreed that it was possible to fail exams during one's menstruation:

You fail in exams as you have pains during periods. You can't concentrate.

The link between puberty and teenage pregnancy was perceived as a serious problem for girls. Notably, teenage fatherhood was not raised as an issue for concern in the school or the community. Interestingly, many of the boys refuted the popular claim that boys and men initiated sexual relationships with girls, expressing the view that at puberty girls seemed to need such relationships more than boys did. Many of the boys said they could easily control their sexual desire, contrary to popular myths about boys' and men's uncontrollable urges. One of the boys said that, with puberty,

The (boy's) mind becomes mature, big and strong.

Many of the parents appeared to agree with the children that puberty could affect the schooling of both sexes, albeit for different reasons. For example, it was noted that adolescents started adapting modern attitudes towards relationships with the opposite sex, and sometimes engaged in sexual relations. Teachers also noted that sexual maturation resulted in pupils' concentration failing as they became more concerned with their appearance, their walking style, and directing attention at their peers rather than their teachers. Girls reportedly became more conscious of their body, with many trying to conceal their breasts beneath their clothes. They also became withdrawn and tended to avoid the company of boys more than before. Several boys complained that their teachers had not prepared them adequately for dealing with puberty in a modernising society, in which sexual expression was perceived as part of a broader expression of modernity.

HIV/AIDS Education

Most of the teachers teaching AIDS education confessed that they had not been trained on issues pertaining to HIV/AIDS. It was noted that only one teacher in the school had received what teachers described as "brief training on HIV/AIDS" organised by an NGO working in the district. Teachers said they did not have a syllabus to guide and facilitate their AIDS education classes. They expressed a need for greater training, reference materials and updates on the patterns, trends and projections of HIV/AIDS, in order to be able to teach the subject practically and effectively. Despite the prevailing situation, all the teachers interviewed said that AIDS education was being taught in the school and integrated into subjects as diverse as Islamic Religious Education (IRE), Geography History and Civics (GHC), and Science. Reportedly, an AIDS lesson was supposed to be taught once a week for between five and 10 minutes. It was not clear how teachers managed to

teach effectively within such a limited timeframe. However, the teachers expressed a strong awareness of AIDS issues and expressed a belief that AIDS education was an important aspect of the school curriculum.

Some of the topics covered during AIDS lessons in the school include:

- HIV/AIDS and its causes;
- Modes of HIV transmission;
- Prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Teachers also claimed that they taught about other sexually transmitted diseases, including:

- Definitions of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STIs);
- How to prevent STIs;
- AIDS as an STI;
- Controlling the spread of AIDS through behaviour change and peer influence;
- Drugs and drug abuse;
- Defining and relating to friends.

The pupils interviewed said that AIDS education taught them the following topics:

- What AIDS is;
- The symptoms of AIDS;
- How to prevent HIV infection.

Most of the teachers said they felt comfortable teaching AIDS education and thought their pupils were comfortable too. They said the pupils were keen to learn about AIDS, how it was spread, and how to avoid it. Although several of the teachers claimed that their involvement in AIDS education had helped to change their perceptions about sexuality, it was not clear whether it had also helped to change their sexual behaviour or their attitudes towards the traditional practices that predisposed people to HIV infection.

Although girls and boys were taught about AIDS together, the teachers admitted that boys participated more than girls during the lessons. They reported incidences of laughter during these lessons, particularly at the mention of reproductive organs. While some teachers said they encouraged all pupils to discuss issues of sexuality and behaviour, they seemed to ignore the subtle role of gender in their lessons, during which they expected girls to discuss culturally taboo topics with adult teachers and male classmates. Nonetheless, most of the teachers expressed hope that, through their AIDS lessons, some of their pupils would adapt to more healthy sexual behaviour.

The pupils confirmed that boys and girls were always taught together, irrespective of the subject matter and cultural gender perspectives. Clearly the teachers seemed ignorant of the potentially negative influences of gender dynamics during classwork relating to AIDS and sexuality. The pupils also confirmed the researchers' observations that girls were relatively more timid than boys during AIDS lessons.

During the focus group discussions, teachers suggested that parents were the best positioned adults to discuss and teach their children on matters of sexuality, while teachers played a complementary role. While some of the parents agreed with this, however, others disagreed, claiming that the school and its teachers should be responsible for delivering all AIDS-related education. Such tendencies to 'pass the buck' on such a critical issue clearly have adverse implications for pupils' chances of acquiring practical AIDS education and life skills.

The role of AIDS education

Schoolboys and girls described AIDS education as an important part of their education, saying things like:

- **It gives us advice on how to avoid AIDS (14 year old, Standard 8)**
- **It gives us knowledge on how to protect ourselves (15 year old, Standard 7)**
- **It is good for my life (14 year old, Standard 7)**
- **It helps us to learn how to protect ourselves (14 year old, Standard 7).**

Out-of-school children described the AIDS education they received in the *madarasa* as important in helping them to avoid the disease. Many of the out-of-school girls expressed a desire for more AIDS education. Notably, the general perception that AIDS education backed up Islamic teachings on sexual relations appeared to elicit acceptability among the out-of-school children, as shown in the following comment from 14-year-old Ahmed:

We are told to avoid girls, just like the Quran teaches us.

Observing AIDS education lessons

As a way of triangulating their field data, the researchers observed several AIDS awareness lessons, during which they noted the following trends:

- There was a lot of whispering among the pupils, suggesting feelings of excitement about the lesson.
- Girls sat separately from the boys, as required by their culture and religion.
- Boys participated more than the girls. When asked a question, the girls answered in very low voices and often kept quiet when asked to repeat their responses. This reflects cultural expectations whereby girls are not supposed to be outspoken in the presence of men. In this community, the boys were being constructed as 'men in the making', while the girls were perceived as 'wives to be'.
- The girls were generally quiet and shy, and looked down when certain words were being mentioned (ie. 'sex', 'sexually active', 'sexual intercourse'). They also looked down when asked to answer a question, as is expected of them by custom.
- The teachers addressed the pupils by name or the term 'you', or by asking anyone

willing to contribute or ask a question. This appeared to be a relatively friendly approach to teaching. There was no evidence of teachers labelling or criticising pupils.

- However, some teachers used approaches that were clearly authoritarian. They maintained serious expressions – and total control of their classes.
- Boys received most of the teachers' attention, perhaps because the latter were male and it is customary for boys and men to be outspoken.
- Teachers made little attempt to engage the girls in discussions on HIV/AIDS. The girls were often ignored and sometimes appeared to be forgotten altogether – allowing the boys to continue dominating the class.
- One girl was active but not noticed by the teacher, presumably because being active was perceived as conflicting with her gender positioning. By ignoring such girls, teachers manage effectively to silence them and render them 'voiceless' in class.
- There were incidences of laughter, especially when a boy mentioned the use of condoms and when another boy narrated the day his father called for a family meeting to discuss AIDS. Notably, girls were excluded from these discussions and their presence in class was largely reduced to the level of spectators.

During interviews and focus group discussions with teachers, it was claimed that several teaching methods were applied in AIDS education, including question and answer sessions, role-plays and group discussions. However, from observations of the lessons, it was clear that they were dominated by the question-and-answer method.

AIDS education: challenges and gaps

Due to inadequate training and a lack of quality reference materials, the teachers faced several challenges in implementing effective AIDS education. As well as the low levels of participation by female pupils, the teachers said they had difficulty teaching topics related to sexuality, which tradition prohibited men from discussing with girls. Considering the dearth of female teachers in the school, one of the teachers recommended that parents should be brought into their AIDS awareness lessons in order to realise the importance of teaching their children on matters of sexuality, HIV and AIDS.

Problems also emerged from the general perception that talking about sex and sexuality was essentially immoral, thus putting the teachers in an awkward position in relation to their pupils. Many of the teachers expressed a strong desire to be trained and given more information on STIs and HIV/AIDS, in order to better fulfil their pupils' practical learning needs. The main topics on which teachers thought boys and girls needed more information were HIV prevention measures, the history of the AIDS pandemic in Kenya, and the nature of HIV infections.

Behaviour Change, Life Skills and AIDS Education

When researchers asked the pupils how they were benefiting from AIDS education at school, all of the boys and girls claimed that it had positively altered their sexual behaviour. Many said they had resolved to avoid having sex or were being more careful in pursuing sexual relationships. Such declarations, however, seemed to contradict the statements – especially from girls – that their traditional and religious teachings required them to keep away from members of the opposite sex. For example, Haji, a 14-year-old Standard 6 boy, reported that, because of AIDS education, the boys were no longer involved in sexual relationships at all:

> **Now we are not going to do it because it destroys our bodies. Before the subject [AIDS education], boys used to have sex with girls. Now we are not going to do it.**

In view of these observations, the dividing line between traditional and religious education and AIDS education remains blurred, and it can only be presumed that the two types of education function in a complementary manner. However, it makes sense to assume that some of the girls and boys were involved in heterosexual relationships that included intimacy, although not always of a sexual nature. Most of the interviews with young people suggested that their knowledge of HIV/AIDS had recently increased, albeit in often minimal ways. Many of the boys declared that they were now more careful in their relationships, and several of them suggested that they no longer engaged in sex. Among their comments were:

- **Now I will avoid sexual intercourse. (15 year old Standard 8)**
- **Now I know the disease is bad. (15 year old, Standard 7)**
- **Before I thought AIDS could be treated. AIDS education made me aware that AIDS has no cure. (14 year old, out of school).**

The following statements are representative of the responses from schoolgirls:

- **I have changed. I understand and follow the teachings, and avoid bad things (16 year old, Standard 7)**
- **I take care nowadays. (14 year old, Standard 7).**

From these comments, it is reasonable to assume that AIDS education has resulted in some widespread changes in perceptions, attitudes and behaviour in the Garissa area.

However, girls and boys in Garissa also said that they felt at risk from possible physical or sexual attacks. The girls appeared to be quite anxious about being violated sexually by boys and men, making them susceptible to HIV infection and pregnancy, and said they

often sought group solidarity to discourage such attacks. Several of the girls outlined common strategies for ensuring their safety, which included:

- **Girls walking in groups when they go to fetch water or firewood.**
- **Girls being escorted by a male relative when going to far off places.**
- **Girls screaming in the event of attack.**
- **Reporting any instances or forms of harassment to teachers or parents.**

It was interesting to observe so many young people from this relatively closed and traditional society talking, often openly and freely, about issues of sex, sexuality, gender and HIV/AIDS – all topics that were traditionally and culturally considered shameful or taboo.

B) FINDINGS FROM NAIROBI

Study Locale and Subjects

In 2001, Kenya's capital city had an estimated population of 2.15 million people, living in an area of just 696 square kilometres. The city has several 'slums' of informal housing, the largest of which is Kibera, where our study was conducted. Kibera is considered one of the poorest, most densely populated 'slums' in the whole of Africa. Accommodation is largely in small shacks built from mud, timber and iron sheets, with very poor supplies of water and public sanitation.

The study school is administratively situated in Dagoretti Division, while the school's catchment is the Kibera and neighbouring Kabati areas. The majority of the participating pupils were from the Laini Saba sub-location of Kibera.

Socio-economic characteristics

Kibera's residents come from very diverse socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The majority are engaged in low-paying jobs and small-scale business enterprises, including the sale of fruit, vegetables and cereals, retail shops, and other informal '*jua kali*' market activities. The community is characterised by widespread poverty and unemployment, congested dwellings, frequent incidences of sexual harassment, the common use of illicit drugs and alcohol, the presence of video kiosks showing uncensored movies, widespread child labour, disillusionment with education, high school dropout rates, and poor parental controls on children.

The primary school site

The sample primary school was established in the late 1950s by the British colonial administration to cater for the children of African workers. After independence, in 1968, the school was registered as a full primary school with classes 1-7 comprising four streams, with a total capacity of 1,200 pupils. The school operated with four streams until 1988, when enrolment fell with the introduction of cost sharing. Since then, the school has been operating under three streams, with a current enrolment of 702 pupils, comprising 350 boys and 352 girls. Unlike the Garissa school, 22 of the Nairobi school's 25 teachers are female. In the year 2001, the school had a mean score of 47.5% in the KCPE. The school attracts children from relatively low-income areas such as Kibera, Kawangware, Nairobi West, Wilson Airport, Dagoretti and Waithaka – most of which are categorised as 'slum' settlements.

The research subjects

The Nairobi sample comprised of schoolboys and schoolgirls as well as boys and girls who were out of school, parents, teachers and community leaders from varied socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The majority of the children interviewed came from relatively poor families from the Kikuyu, Luo, Luhyia, Kamba and Somali tribes. There were only two Muslim families, while the remainder were Christians.

The children came from families of varied sizes, ranging from five to 14 members, with some living with their aunts, uncles or cousins. The majority of the parents operated small-scale businesses, ranging from small kiosks to the sale of salt, while others were employed as causal workers in the public and private sectors.

Many of the teachers interviewed were P1 teachers with at least five years of teaching experience. Like the families, the teachers came from different ethnic backgrounds, including Kamba, Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Meru, Luo and Luhyia.

Gender roles allocated to children

During the interviews, the boys and girls reported that they performed different roles at home, which were prescribed by their different cultures and gendered accordingly. Both boys and girls seemed to agree with the role allocation that relegated girls to domestic duties, such as washing, cleaning the house, cooking, purchasing food, caring for younger children, and sometimes fetching water, especially when the boys were not available. Girls also reported helping their mothers in income generating activities, such as selling vegetables and other foodstuffs. However, some girls expressed a dislike of this kind of work, which was associated with a lack of personal freedom.

Many of the boys and a few girls reported that the main occupation for boys outside school was washing cars, fetching water, and running errands to the shops, especially in the evenings. However, 12 of the 17 girls interviewed felt that these duties did not provide enough work for the boys – allowing them, as 15-year-old Linga stated, too much

time for "just sitting there and eating". Another girl, 14-year-old Anyango, complained bitterly that,

Boys don't do anything – just sit there, and watch television only.

Several girls also complained that boys shied away from domestic duties, which they perceived purely as "girls' work". Some of the girls blamed their parents for promoting unequal divisions of labour in the home setting. For example, 14-year-old Prisca argued that, although some boys offered to help with chores such as cooking, their parents often discouraged them from this, leading the girls to gain greater experience in the kitchen – and the boys to give up trying to help.

For their part, 13 of the 15 schoolboys confirmed that they did not like doing domestic chores, which they all regarded as "girls' work". The interview excerpt below clearly shows how 14-year-old Elijah has been influenced by the gender role conditioning in his upbringing:

Interviewer:	**What roles do boys do at home?**
Elijah:	**Fetch water, watch television…**
Interviewer:	**What else?**
Elijah:	**Visit friends… urr…**
Interviewer:	**How about girls – what roles do they perform at home?**
Elijah:	**Wash utensils and clothes, sweep the house, cook, and other duties in the house.**
Interviewer:	**How about you – what do you do in the home?**
Elijah:	**Watch television and fetch water.**
Interviewer:	**Any other?**
Elijah:	**No.**
Interviewer:	**How about household duties?**
Elijah:	**I do not like… urr… I do not like washing utensils.**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Elijah:	**I feel it's a girl's job.**

Only a few boys conceded that they occasionally contributed to work at home – but only then when their sisters or mothers were absent. James, a 14-year-old in Standard 7, indicated that when at home, he performed only those chores that he deemed to be straightforward, saying:

> **I like sweeping the house because it is easy.**

Gender roles and their implications for girls' schooling

Girls in a focus group discussion complained vehemently about the hefty amount of work they were allocated at home, which left many of them with hardly any time to do their homework or revision. As one girl explained,

> **If your parents are good, they will let you do your homework, otherwise some of the parents say *Sio mimi unasomea* ['You are not reading for me'].**

The girls also complained that, due to the work given to them by their parents each morning, they often arrived late at school, where they were reprimanded by their teachers for being late. Teachers reportedly labelled such girls as "crooks" and accused them of staying out late and attending nightspots, which resulted in them waking up late. The following narrative from one of the girls encapsulates the types of insults that they have to endure for arriving at school late:

> **You are a crook, and do you have children at home that you were washing napkins for? Or where did you pass? *Umetoka disco*? *Umetoka kuonjwa-onjwa*? ['Have you come from a disco? Have you come from being tasted, ie. sexually?]**

Many girls expressed disaffection with what they perceived as the unfair division of labour in their homes, and the consequences it was having on their education. In parallel, many boys said they perceived the jobs allocated to girls to be "dirty" or otherwise demeaning. These boys perceived their roles as conferring a higher status on them than their female siblings and peers. Most parents apparently allocated comparatively more housework to girls, thus participating in the perpetuation of gender inequality in the family. By allocating girls a greater number of domestic duties, the parents and other adults in the family not only emerged as colluders in the gendering of their girls and boys as polar opposites, but also helped create a foundation for polarising femininity and masculinity. It is upon such polarisations that boys and men learn to construct girls and women as objects of oppression and exploitation.

During the focus group discussions, the mothers confirmed an imbalance in the division of roles at home. They noted that girls were responsible for preparing breakfast and cleaning the house before going to school. Boys hardly did anything in the morning other than getting ready for school. After school, some parents observed that duties were shared among boys and girls, although the girls still did more work, particularly in the home. Boys were often asked to fetch water or sent to the shops to buy groceries. Although most parents agreed that girls performed more work than their male siblings, they saw this as preparing them for their future roles as wives and mothers. One mother claimed she

found it odd to assign household responsibilities to her sons, while another noted that some mothers were commercial sex workers who hardly cared for their children. Such parents, it was claimed, set bad examples for their daughters, to whom they delegated all the work at home – thus making them 'surrogate mothers' while they were still children and in school.

In the school, similar gendering processes were at work. For example, girls reported that duties such as wiping windows and emptying dustbins had been masculinised and were only allocated to boys. Other duties, including wiping the teachers' tables and looking after their book cupboards, were feminised and hence assigned only to girls. Reportedly, the teachers believed that girls were tidier than boys and did a comparatively better job. However, the girls complained that, while duties such as cleaning classrooms and fetching water for mopping floors were allocated to boys and girls equally, the boys often got away with refusing to honour such arrangements.

Interviews with the girls revealed that, despite the existence of a roster allocating work equally to both boys and girls, the boys preferred fetching water and leaving the girls to mop the classrooms, which they apparently did not like doing. Many of the boys negotiated to exchange their duties with individual girls. However, even when they failed in these negotiations, they still often refused to mop the classrooms – labelling it "a girl's job". Instructively, the teachers were reported to ignore the blatant disregard of school authority, thus allowing the boys' defiance to pass unchallenged. Eventually, several of the girls were made to fetch water and clean the classrooms without any assistance from the boys. Clearly, this is a demonstration of the ways in which the school reinforced the family and community norms of gendering roles, which concurrently empowered boys and disempowered girls.

When one of the researchers challenged a 14-year-old Standard 7 girl prefect, Mwelu, about the apparent 'disempowering' process that made girls function as the slaves of boys and of the school, she explained it as follows:

Interviewer: **Here in school, what duties are assigned to boys?**

Mwelu: **Sweep class, fetch water [for] girls to mop the floor.**

Interviewer: **Fetch water from where?**

Mwelu: **From the tap.**

Interviewer: **For girls to mop the classroom?**

Mwelu: **Yes.**

Interviewer:	**Why always the girls?**
Mwelu:	**Boys don't like mopping the floor. They will leave the class like that and go to play.**
Interviewer:	**As a prefect, what do you do about that?**
Mwelu:	**Nothing.**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Mwelu:	**I can't punish them.**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Mwelu:	**[It's] just like that. If I tell them to do it they can beat me.**
Interviewer:	**Do you tell this to the teacher?**
(Silence)	
Interviewer:	**So you tell the girls to do the boys' work?**
Mwelu:	**Yes.**
Interviewer:	**Does the teachers know?**
Mwelu:	**Yes.**
Interviewer:	**And what do they do?**
Mwelu:	**The teacher just leaves them out [of the work], and the girls wash [the classrooms].**

From this discussion, it is clear that the teachers were largely insensitive to justice, fairness and gender equality in the ways that they responded to the boys' avoidance of their school duties. Clearly, the school, which is charged with the development of future citizens, was guilty of nurturing a masculine culture that was defiant of authority, ignorant of the role of women and girls in society, and uneducated about the centrality of reproductive roles in the development of a nation.

Gender roles performed by parents

A major responsibility for fathers, as reported by both boys and girls, was the provision of basic needs such as housing, food and education. However, some of the children indicated that their mothers also participated in meeting these needs. Nonetheless, many children

portrayed the mother's role as exclusively managing the home and performing domestic duties. This perception was despite the observation that many mothers were family heads and were engaged in gainful employment. In most families, it was also the mother's responsibility to ensure that the children attended school. In the absence of the mother, the boys and girls reported that girls were usually the ones who 'deputised' for their mothers.

Mothers were also reported to provide care and guidance on sexuality to their daughters, but not their sons. As 13-year-old Akinyi observed,

Mothers take care of girls so that they don't become pregnant.

All the boys and girls, both in and out of school, reported that their fathers did not engage in any domestic duties. A typical description of a father's activities at home was as follows:

He comes home from work, rests, reads newspapers, watches television, eats and sleeps.

Mbatha, a 14-year-old schoolgirl, had much more to say about her father in her interview:

Interviewer:	**Who does the housework at home?**
Mbatha:	**My mother, my sister and me.**
Interviewer:	**How about your father?**
Mbatha:	**Who… my father? Mmm… never. He just sits idle at home.**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Mbatha:	**He cannot [do domestic work]. He says that is my mother's work and me.**
Interviewer:	**Really, why?**
Mbatha:	**Just like that. Mmm… Even my brother, he cannot do it… My father tells him not to. He says it is girls' work. He even tells my brother not to come into the kitchen to do girls' work.**

Such interviews provide a vivid illustration of the ways in which many girls perceive the roles of their fathers *vis-à-vis* those of their mothers in the home.

All of the boys, in and out of school, agreed with the girls' observations of the polarisation of gender construction within their families. They portrayed their fathers as having a key responsibility of heading the family and providing physical and financial security. The modes of performing these roles were very clear, as illustrated in the following interview with 13-year-old Oduor:


Interviewer: **What about your father, what are his duties?**

Oduor: **My dad goes to work, and then comes back home.**

Interviewer: **OK.**

Oduor: **Three o'clock is when he comes back.**

Interviewer: **At night?**

Oduor: **Yes.**

Interviewer: **So, what does he do when he comes back?**

Oduor: **He only watches television and then he sleeps.**

With the kind of models of fatherhood available to the Nairobi boys, it seems likely that many of them will emulate the non-domesticated images of masculinities that are perceived to be the exact opposite of femininities. They will thus grow up into men who expect the women in their lives to serve them, rather than to function as allies and partners. A few of the schoolgirls agreed with the boys that fathers were "not meant" to do any work at home, because housework was perceived to be the exclusive domain of mothers and girls. For example, 14-year-old Mwelu interpreted her father's "idleness" in the context of a divine design by God, which exempted men from housework. Such ideas raise pertinent questions about the roles of parents, schools and religious teachers, who appear to be responsible for inculcating such teachings in young people.


Interviewer: **What do fathers do at home?**

Mwelu: **Just watch football.**

Interviewer:	**What else?**
Mwelu:	**Nothing.**
Interviewer:	**Nothing? When he comes into the house, what does he do?**
Mwelu:	**He just sits there, watches the football matches, then he just eats and sleeps.**
Interviewer:	**Do you think he should be doing some of the housework?**
Mwelu:	**Who? (Appears to be wondering if the researcher could really be referring to her father)**
Interviewer:	**Your father.**
Mwelu:	**No! (Emphatically)**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Mwelu:	**Because they are the head of the house.**
Interviewer:	**So who should do the work?**
Mwelu:	**Mother.**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Mwelu:	**Because she was the second to be made by God, she must do all the work in the house...**
Interviewer:	**If mother is not there, who should do the work?**
Mwelu:	**Me.**
Interviewer:	**Why not your brother?**
Mwelu:	**Because I am a girl...**

The out-of-school children tended to talk only about their mothers, who they described as workers in "small" jobs, such as selling charcoal, laundering and cooking for others. One girl explained that her mother did nothing for a living and they depended upon their grandmother to feed them. It is instructive that all the out-of-school girls in the single-sex

discussions did not refer to the existence or knowledge of their fathers as they described life with their mothers.

From the findings, it appears that although many of the girls were critical of their fathers' non-participation in the home, they did not want to challenge the *status quo* – perhaps because their mothers appeared to be complacent. They thus continued to fit in as 'deputy mothers' and did whatever was expected of them in that role.

Boys' and girls' leisure time

The findings indicate that girls do not have as much free time as boys. Girls claimed they spent most of their time doing domestic chores and/or helping their mothers in their businesses, such as selling vegetables. A 14-year-old Standard 7 girl said she was expected to help her mother with housework when she was free, confirming that she did not have any time to herself – as should be the right of every child. Occasionally, the girls found limited free time, during which they played with their friends, read books or watched television. While in school, many girls said they spent their free time discussing school activities and TV programmes such as *Days Of Our Lives*, *Miami Sands*, *Home and Away*, *Vioja Mahakamani*, *Nuru* and *Kisulisuli*, most of which are romantic soap operas. Many teachers, however, gave a different picture, saying that girls had a lot of free time in the evenings, which they spent in discos.

During their free time, boys were said to play football, watch videos and television, relax or visit friends. They also ran errands outside the home, which provided them with an opportunity to explore beyond the confines of their homesteads. In addition, the out-of-school boys also worked for pay. For example, Kimani, a 12-year-old boy explained how he earned money during his free time:

> **I fetch water, fetch garbage, and am sent to buy cigarettes for boys in video shows for pay.**

Another boy, 13-year-old Mwangi, said that he ferried loads for people who paid him money. When not engaged in paid activities, he said he spent his time with other boys "loitering around" and looking for jobs.

Generally, the young participants spent their free time fitting into clearly stereotyped gender roles, with the boys spending most of their time outside the home, while the girls spent theirs mostly performing domestic chores in the home. This practice offered the boys many more chances to experience different public settings, and to learn how to cope with social and economic issues outside the home environment.

Tradition and Modernity

Boys and Girls Talking About Tradition and Modernity

The young interviewees addressed various issues relating to how they perceived tradition and modernity. They conceded that although many traditional practices such as circumcision, early marriage and dress codes affected girls more than boys, both boys and girls observed – and were expected to observe – traditional practices such as respecting one's elders, visiting witchdoctors, and taking herbal medicines.

The boys described as 'traditional' the practice of parents choosing brides for their sons, polygamy, and the various rituals associated with rites of passage, such as the removal of teeth and tattooing among some Kenyan tribes. In comparison, the girls perceived tradition as being manifested in the wearing of long clothes, female circumcision, early marriage, the shaving of hair, and the wearing of flat-soled shoes.

Modernity was constructed in opposition of tradition, thus creating a relationship that polarised the two types of lifestyles. Examples of popular images of modernity comprised the wearing of short clothes by girls and women, the use of hair chemicals such as 'relaxers', the wearing of high-heeled shoes, and the completion of formal schooling. Interestingly, the boys' perceptions of modernity included concepts such as freedom of choice and gender equality, through which girls and boys undertook to do housework equally. For the girls, living in town, having luxury items such as televisions and videos, and listening to the radio were regarded as indicators of modernity.

Teachers and Other Adults Talking About Tradition and Modernity

The teachers and parents interviewed seemed to agree with the children's perception of modernity as associated with living and working in towns, attending social events, going to cinemas, dressing in "modern clothes" (including tight-fitting clothes for girls and women), and being generally enlightened about world issues. Like their children, they perceived tradition as the opposite of modernity, as characterised by ceremonies and rituals from "old times".

Boys and girls describing their parents

Some of the boys and girls perceived their parents as traditional, while others perceived them as modern. Some of the children felt their parents were traditional because they were born in rural areas and continued to adhere to traditional expectations in the social life of their offspring. A 13-year-old boy, Okello, said his father was traditional because he was polygamous, while Njeri, a 15-year-old Standard 7 girl, said her mother was traditional as,

She wears long dresses and covers herself with *a lesso* everywhere.

Some parents were perceived to be modern because of their shunning of traditional rites of passage, such as the removing of dentures and the circumcision of girls. Although most of the parents considered themselves to be modern, two parents stressed that their lifestyles comprised a combining of "useful" aspects from both tradition and modernity.

Even with all the criticisms levelled against modernity, it was interesting to note that almost all of the boys and girls described themselves as modern. Only one girl said she was both modern and traditional, while one out-of-school boy perceived himself to be traditional.

Various factors were referred to as accounting for one's positioning as modern or traditional, including physical location, behaviour, age, access to television and cinemas, the sharing of domestic duties, and attending school. Most of the boys and girls believed that, as they were born and lived in Nairobi and attended school, they were automatically modern. The 13-year-old boy who considered himself traditional said,

> **Modernity is not good. It makes people go to cinemas.**

While tradition was seen more in terms of cultural practices, modernity was perceived more in the context of town life, formal education, pop culture, "cool" dressing styles, and "hanging out" in particular social places. Parents considered many of the same attributes in describing their children as modern, as one parent commented:

> **My children are modern because of the way they dress. They live a modern way of life. They live in Nairobi, which is a city. Even living in slums is considered a consequence of modernity.**

Influence of tradition and modernity on boys' and girls' behaviour

As reported by most of the boys and girls, modernity tended to influence people's behaviour in both positive and negative ways. Some of the negative influences include lack of respect for elders, girls dressing "badly" (ie. in tight, short or transparent outfits), and watching "bad movies", supposedly with a sexual content.

According to a 14-year-old boy, Odhiambo, modernity had transformed gender roles, as many boys and girls could be observed sharing domestic chores, which was very rare before:

> **Boys and girls behave the same [these days]. Both can collect firewood when you go up-country.**

Many of the participants' comments suggested that modernity offers avenues for boys to pursue more individualistic lifestyles, which are relatively free of the communal sanctions that discourage boys from sharing duties in the home. One girl also commented that her own modernity made her unable to fit into rural settings, where she did not know how to perform common farm duties.

Parents noted that modernity had also affected childrearing practices, which had become more "liberal" and gave children much more freedom to do what they wanted. As one parent complained,

> **Even if you don't allow them to do certain things, they still go ahead and do it anyway.**

Nairobi Subjects Constructing Gender Identities

Describing the Self

In describing themselves, all of the boys and girls cited their ages, genders, physical attributes, favourite activities (watching videos, listening to music, playing football), as well as specific likes and dislikes. Most of the boys and girls started their descriptions by declaring their names followed by statements such as "I am a boy/girl". Being popular among peers also seemed to contribute to a positive sense of self-identity in most of the young participants.

Almost all of the interviewees stressed that they were happy to remain a member of their gender. In a typical answer, Wamalwa, a 15-year-old boy in Standard 8, portrayed a strong understanding of the social and material privileges associated with masculinities:

> **I am happy to be a boy because when you are a boy you can be like the father when he is not there. You will be the heir of parents' properties when they die.**

By comparison, most of the girls constructed their identities in the context of social virtues such as honesty, good behaviour, obedience and hard work. Mwende, a 15-year-old girl, constructed herself positively, saying,

> **I am a good girl. I like to help my parents. I don't go out to walk [ie. with boys] like other girls.**

Like their Garissa counterparts, many of the girls tended to disassociate themselves from "walking with boys", which was considered immoral because it implied engagement in sexual activities. However, even in their efforts to appear disinterested in sexual relations, some girls still constructed themselves as attractive to boys. A few girls demonstrated the importance of being physically attractive, notably by referring to the fairness of their complexions (see section on *Popular girls and popular boys* in the Garissa findings). As Mwelu, a 13-year-old girl in Standard 7, said,

> **I am brown, tall... I am liked by many. They call me a *mzungu* [Caucasian].**

The young people were thus constructing their identities around established stereotypes of masculinities and femininities, with the girls focusing on being able to attract the

'other' while the boys concentrated on the physical and material privileges that men enjoy in society. Boyhood was also constructed around physical strength, which several boys said made them good at games, such as football and basketball. For both girls and boys, their performances at school were also an important factor in the ways that they constructed their identities. As 15-year-old Wamalwa, a Standard 7 boy, said,

> **I like my knowledge in maths and science, and talents in debate, poems, music and public speaking.**

In contrast to these positive attributes, the young participants also cited the following qualities that they considered socially inappropriate and that they claimed to shun:

> **Abusing and beating people. (14-year-old boy)**
>
> **Doing bad things like taking people's things. (15-year-old boy)**
>
> **Being rude to parents, abusing people, talking bad manners. (14-year-old girl)**

The researchers observed reasonable levels of honesty, as the young people openly discussed their personal shortcomings and failures. For example, a 13-year-old boy and a 14-year-old girl both commented on the difficulty that they faced in understanding lessons in class.

Peer popularity

Boys and girls not only developed their identities in relation to how they perceived themselves, but also how others perceived them. The interviews revealed that most boys and girls perceived themselves as popular and confidently defined themselves as such. Popularity among peers was portrayed as a good thing, which most young people appeared to covet. This popularity tended to traverse gender boundaries, with masculinities and femininities often constructed around similar qualities and virtues. For example, "roaming the streets" made young people unpopular, regardless of their gender, while obedience and respect for elders were considered virtues in both girls and boys. As one 14-year-old Standard 8 boy said,

> **I am liked by others because I don't roam around. I don't lie to the teachers, I am well mannered, I am a good basketballer.**

Many of the girls said that being honest, supportive of others, and generally well behaved made them popular. Other young people located their popularity in their ability to attract peer attention and admiration. In this context, one of the boys said,

> **I am popular. They call my name all the time…**

While a girl said,

> **I have support of the other girls and some of the boys. When others talk about me, I am told.**

Emotions in Young People's Lives

The boys and girls in the study used diaries to record things that made them happy, sad, angry or embarrassed while they were in and out of school. The recorded information was later triangulated with the interview data to help capture the role of emotions in the lives of these young people, as they constructed their gender and sexual identities.

An analysis of the diaries revealed only a few differences between the types of entries made by the boys and the girls. Regardless of their gender, most of the participants indicated that they experienced happiness when playing with their friends, telling jokes, performing well at school, and, for some of them, just having parents in their lives. Failing school examinations was considered particularly bad because the pupils disliked being jeered at and shamed by their classmates. For instance, Wamalwa, the 13-year-old Standard 7 boy, said,

> **Failing examinations makes me sad. People laugh at me, and this is shaming.**

The girls said they felt fulfilled when they received presents for good school performances or were congratulated publicly for them. The apparent closeness between mothers and their daughters was evident in the girls' diaries, in which several of them expressed happiness at being able to assist their mothers with domestic work – and perhaps gain their approval in the process:

> **I am happy when I help my mother with work. (15-year-old girl in Standard 7)**

> **[I am] happy when I finish work given by my mother. (14-year-old girl in Standard 8)**

Compared with the Garissa site, very few of the Nairobi pupils referred to religion as part of their daily life. Notably, only one Nairobi girl claimed that she enjoyed religious activities, saying she was happy when she preached to people and they were "saved".

Although not one of the girls complained about being described as "boyish", several boys said that being referred to as "girlish" upset them deeply. This was clearly an affront to their much-cherished images of masculinity. One of the boys was explicit about this position:

> **I am sad when people talk about me, for example [telling me] 'you are behaving like a girl'.**

The following are extracts from pupils' interviews highlighting some of the things that they said made them feel miserable:

- **Being beaten by the teacher**

- **Being given more work by parents**
- **When teacher complains about me**
- **Being beaten by other boys**
- **Abusing somebody**
- **When my parents quarrel.**

As was observed in Garissa, the loss of family members was a major source of anxiety for many of the Nairobi girls, as noted in the following comments:

I was sad when I lost my mother

Having no parent and home.

Both the boys and girls considered pregnancy as embarrassing, not only to the affected girl, but to others acquainted with her. Emotions relating to relationships with members of the opposite sex were also mentioned frequently. Fighting over boyfriends among girls was reportedly common and elicited considerable anxiety and embarrassment. One of the girls described the practice of insulting people's mothers, which she said was common among her peers and made her feel really angry – especially when it concerned her mother.

It seemed that several girls and boys had to endure the absence of one or both of their parents from home, which they said caused them fear during the night. Some families rented rooms in separate sections of Kibera, which meant that many children slept apart from their parents – and caused considerable anxiety to daughters who faced the risk of sexual intruders at night. Some children said that such sleeping arrangements also encouraged young people to attend discos or to "entertain" members of the opposite sex. Many girls expressed concern about the discos, in which the disc jockeys were known to switch off the lights to create opportunities for boys and men to molest the girls.

Importantly, most of the girls said that when they went to nightclubs, they were careful not to leave their drinks unattended so men could not slip drugs into them. They claimed that some men were notorious for putting aphrodisiacs or '*kukumanga'* into girls' drinks, in order to have non-consensual sexual relations with them. Although many of the girls reportedly went out to the clubs and discos, it was clear that they were afraid of being abused or exploited sexually, as one of the schoolgirls narrated:

I fear being raped, because one can be raped anytime and anywhere. Uncles are very bad; they can rape you if your parents are not there. They ask you to give them a glass of water, follow you from the back, hold you, and rape you.

The findings reveal that girls were not only afraid of rape outside the home, but also within their own houses. Some girls recommended that fathers be banned from living alone with their daughters, because some of them were known to be incestuous. This concern was clearly voiced in the following interview with a 13-year-old Standard 7 girl:

Girl: **Even fathers you cannot trust.**

Interviewer: **Why?**

Girl: **They cheat you when mother is not there. They say, 'Come we go to the shop. I will buy you a present.'**

Interviewer: **Really?**

Girl: **Then they will take you to a hotel, and rape you there. They say not to tell mother.**

Girls also reported that some of their parents provided their daughters with contraceptives and even facilitated abortions. But most of the girls criticised this practice, arguing that it encouraged sexual activity and, by implication, exposed them to STIs and HIV/AIDS.

The study also revealed that many young people lived in fear of sexual relationships with peers of the opposite sex. Most of the girls expressed a fear of pregnancy and its consequences, including dropping out of school and possibly being disowned by their parents. Several boys also said they were afraid of making girls pregnant and causing them to drop out of school. However, neither the boys nor the girls demonstrated a knowledge of the life skills that would enable them to have healthy, non-sexual relationships with members of the opposite sex.

The influence and power of 'sugar daddies' was also a clear source of concern among the Nairobi schoolgirls. Elderly men reportedly lured girls into having sex with them in exchange for money and other material gifts. One of the girls reported that sugar daddies often made false promises by suggesting that they would buy them expensive items such as cars and clothes. However, the girls claimed that even without the expensive items, the sugar daddies often got their way by providing cheap presents, including fast food. Many of the girls interviewed said they were aware that older men suspected young girls to be free of HIV/AIDS, and that girls who had sex with these men placed themselves at considerable risk of contracting STIs and HIV. However, due to poverty and parental negligence, some of the girls reportedly surrendered to the manipulations of sugar daddies.

To a lesser extent, some of the boys also spoke of their encounters with 'sugar mummies', who they claimed enticed them to become their lovers. Some boys said they feared having sex with such older women, from whom they might contract STIs or HIV. The boys also expressed anxiety about the possibility of becoming hooked on drugs, which they said was a common problem among male youths in the community and even in the school.

Exploring Gender Identities in Different Contexts

Fluidity of Identities

This study reveals how girls and boys positioned themselves differently as they constructed their identities within different interviews with different categories of researchers. Thus, the young participants constructed and reconstructed themselves as they revealed selectively, rationally or creatively, different aspects and perceptions of themselves in different social contexts.

The findings show that some of the girls and boys responded differently to female and male researchers during interviews focusing on gender identities and relationships with peers of the same and opposite sex. For instance, a male and a female researcher, who interviewed the same girl during different interviews, elicited very different information. In response to issues of sexuality and relationships between boys and girls, the interviewee appeared enthusiastic and uninhibited as she discussed her feelings openly and freely with the female researcher. She, for instance, narrated an incident of a rape that she allegedly witnessed and that she did not mention to the male researcher. The same girl also told the female researcher that boys did not perform their duties of mopping classrooms; instead, they preferred fetching water for girls to do the cleaning work. However, with the male researcher, she explained that both the boys and girls mopped the classrooms and fetched water.

Addressing the relationships between teachers and pupils, the girl also told the female researcher that male teachers often harassed girls, calling them lazy and accusing them of being in school only as a "pastime" as they waited to be married. She accused one of the male teachers of humiliating schoolgirls by insinuating that they had been "tasted sexually", while comparing them with "cleaner" non-school-going girls. Interestingly, the girl chose not to mention these male-teacher issues to the male researcher, whom she may have identified as 'other' and therefore not empathetic with the schoolgirls' plight . Presumably, also, this girl was constructing the female researcher as a person who was capable of empathising with the 'feminine experience'.

Wamalwa, a 14-year-old boy in Standard 7, demonstrated this shifting of identities when discussing the possibilities of changing sex and asserted to the male researcher,

I would like to remain a boy, to be head of the family.

To the female researcher, however, Wamalwa did not provide any reasons for his

preference for boyhood – probably because he perceived her as an 'other' who was not privy to the culture of masculinity. Clearly, these young people were positioning themselves as active in negotiating their identities, mediating their positions and consciously selecting how they presented themselves in different contexts.

Popular boys and popular girls

In the process of constructing their gender identities, the pupils focused on the idea of popularity as a way of distinguishing themselves from the other. The concept of popularity among boys was based upon various considerations such as good behaviour, helpfulness, trustworthiness, hard work and academic achievement. Among the girls, popularity seemed to depend not only on what was perceived as good behaviour, but also on approval from teachers. The following statements demonstrate how boys constructed popularity among girls. According to Kwendo, a 15-year-old boy,

Mutile is popular because she is smart, well behaved and talks well.

However, another boy aged 13 said:

Matindi is popular because no teacher complains about her.

Among the girl pupils, 15-year-old Mwende described a girl schoolmate as popular because,

She is a clean girl, hardworking, and teachers like her.

Undoubtedly, the relationship with teachers had a direct influence on pupils' perceptions of popularity, as was explained by both female and male pupils in the study. Both boys and girls with responsible positions in the school, such as class prefects, head-boys and girls, were often described as popular, perhaps because of the assumed powers that they tended to have over the other pupils. Having authority to command obedience from fellow pupils might also have contributed to the construction of power that made the prefects prominent in the school.

In the community, some of the schoolboys and girls claimed that they did not know any popular young person outside the school, because they apparently spent most of their time in school and did not have time to interact with their out-of-school peers. However, a few of them claimed that the children who did not roam about and who helped and advised girls tended to be popular in the community. According to one boy, the most popular girl was one who never "ran away" from home, which was reported to be a common occurrence as the girls sought freedom from household drudgery and forced marriages.

The construction of popular boys in the community appeared to be relatively gendered, with boys describing those who were famous players of football and basketball. To the girls, popular boys were those who never engaged in fights, were not abusive, were well behaved, and attended church services. Clearly, among the boys, it is the physical capabilities that make boys popular, while among the girls character seems to be the deciding factor. Being abusive, disruptive, violent, a gossip or a disco or video kiosk

patron usually resulted in a child's unpopularity at school, at home and in the community. The out-of-school children described the taking of illicit drugs such as *bhang*, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and stealing items from other children as reasons for unpopularity among girls and boys.

Boys who were out of school described girls who wore short and tight clothes as unpopular, because they were reportedly responsible for enticing boys and men into sexual activity. Girls who had boyfriends and who lured others to attract boyfriends were considered a bad influence, as explained by a 16-year-old out-of-school girl named Wangoi:

> **Kadogo is unpopular. She gives bad advice… to be someone's boyfriend by force.**

A 14-year-old Standard 7 girl identified another out-of-school girl as unpopular for her rude manners and her interest in boys:

> **Akinyi is unpopular. She likes talking badly with people. [She shows] no respect, walks at night with boys. [She has] no respect for her parents.**

It is noteworthy that the generic perameters for describing young people's popularity were no different between the Nairobi urban youth and their rural Garissa counterparts. In both places, good boys and good girls were described as disciplined, clean, bright, honest, responsible, hardworking, obedient and respectful, thus revealing similarities in the perceptions of ideal girlhood regardless of the difference in socio-cultural contexts.

Although sexually active girls were invariably constructed as "unpopular", one female teacher explained that poverty had entrapped such girls, who often ran away from home to stay with men who provided them with food, money and school books. Some of these girls would, reportedly, leave their homes on the pretext of attending school but detour to their 'sugar daddies' without their parents' knowledge. A few teachers also reported cases of the 'sugar mummy' syndrome, whereby wealthy women allegedly "kept" schoolboys for sexual purposes. In both cases, teachers blamed the parents' lack of responsibility for the plight of such boys and girls. For example, one teacher explained that a girl in his Standard 4 class (where the average age is 10 years) lived alone in a house in the slums, while her parents lived elsewhere in the community. The mother reportedly only visited her daughter on Sundays, while not much was known about the father. In such a situation, the teachers said it was unsurprising that many of these girls and boys were sexually active – and that many of the girls dropped out of school.

Generally, teachers described their boy pupils as more disciplined than girls, because they arrived at school on time and were more likely to complete their homework. However, despite the teachers' perceptions, this study reveals that the girls faced many more social, economic and domestic hurdles, which retarded their ability to compete on an equal footing with boys in school activities.

Although success at school was perceived as instrumental to young people's popularity, one female teacher observed that only a few girls were concerned with their school performance or expressed any interest in proceeding to secondary school or college. According to one of the male teachers, many children were just "pushing on", apparently unconcerned about what would happen to them after Standard 8. This teacher noted that these children's concentration tended to slip after the lunch break, perhaps because

they rarely had anything to eat. Other teachers pointed out that many pupils showed little concern for the outcome of their Standard 8 examinations, and turned straight to selling vegetables or other petty trade, which was what most of their parents did for a living. The teachers argued that poor educational outcomes seemed to have a negative influence on young people's attitudes to schooling – perpetuating a vicious circle in the community's pursuit of education.

Girls and boys as future women and men

From a set of essays that the girls and boys wrote describing themselves as adult women and men, it was clear that professional careers formed an important part of their self-identities. The essays revealed a futuristic construction of identities centred upon a variety of professional careers, including doctors, teachers, pilots and politicians, as outlined in the following table:

Preferred Careers of Schoolboys and Schoolgirls

Careers	Boys	Girls	Total
Doctor	4	4	8
Secretary	-	1	1
Teacher	1	4	5
Editor	-	1	1
Member of Parliament	1	1	2
Judge/Lawyer	-	2	2
Pilot	1	1	2
Nurse	-	3	3
Broadcaster	-	1	1
Architect	-	1	1
Carpenter	1	-	1
Policeman	3	-	3
Priest	4	-	4
Artist	1	-	1
Model	-	1	1

Reasons given for choosing these careers were, however, very different for the boys and the girls. Whereas in the interviews, several girls had described teaching as a favourable occupation, which "bonded" teachers and learners in a common cause, the single boy who aspired to be a teacher cited remuneration as his chief motivation. The boy explained,

> **I will earn money and drive my own car, like Njenga wa Karume.**

The choice of Member of Parliament by a girl and a boy indicated a strong political awareness among the pupils – a characteristic that seems to permeate Kenyan society. The 16-year-old girl aspired to become an MP because it provided a living *and* made people popular. By comparison, the boy aspired to politics in order to emulate his favourite role model, the seasoned politician James Orengo:

> **I would like to be like Orengo. He is the best politician I have ever seen in this world of problems. Whenever he has something in parliament, he never gives up, even if it is as hard as a stone. He is ready to take the bull by the horns... He is just fighting for justice... I will never change my mind of being like him.**

Apart from the choice of doctors, both the girls and boys demonstrated a strong gendering of careers, which reflected traditional beliefs and tendencies. For example, none of the boys wished to become a nurse or a secretary, while only one aspired to become a teacher. Interestingly, none of the boys aspired to become a judge, as might have been expected in traditional stereotyping. Likewise, the girls were clearly disinterested in police work or religious service. However, their choice of nursing and teaching portrays a strong inclination towards service jobs that are perceived to be traditionally feminine.

Among the out-of-school children, most of the boys aspired to become businessmen, while the girls expressed a wish to return to school in order to acquire qualifications for office jobs in the formal sector.

Forming Social Relationships

Relationships with the Same Sex

Boys relating with boys

Boys reported that they related reasonably well among themselves, saying they shared many common interests and enjoyed strong friendships at school, where they discussed schoolwork and sought advice from each other with "personal problems". However, they also reported incidences of theft, disagreements and physical fights between themselves.

The expression of sexual attraction between the sexes seemed to elicit common feelings of jealousy among the boys, which sometimes resulted in fights. Several boys admitted that they fought over girlfriends in order to display their strength and, thus, to attract recognition from the girls. Ironically, however, during the interviews, most boys said they

shunned the use of violence, describing it as "bad behaviour" which spread fear and intimidation among weaker boys. Interestingly, however, many girls expressed a clear preference for "tough boys" who could fight, saying they were capable of protecting their girlfriends from other boys.

Close relationships between the boys appeared to be a sensitive issue, which often drew accusations of homosexuality. It appeared that such accusations – or the fear of them – could jeopardise genuine friendships between boys who were essentially heterosexual. A few of the children alleged that some of the boys were known to rape other boys. Describing such boys, a seemingly concerned 14-year-old schoolboy said,

Some of the boys are bad – they will hold you by force and sleep with you.

Unlike many Western countries, homosexuality has rarely been addressed in any Kenyan research. However, it is instructive that the young participants in this study perceived such alternative expressions of sexuality as a source of anxiety in their social and sexual lives, and chose to discuss them as such. In an era in which HIV/AIDS poses such a threat to Kenya's social and economic development, having young people address such 'taboo' subjects so openly is clearly encouraging.

Referring to friendships among boys, some girls concurred with the boys' observations that "boys fight even over small things" – such as taking one's books or pens. Other girls claimed that most fights among boys were caused by the hatred that developed between them as they competed for girls' attention.

In general, the out-of-school children seemed to have greater difficulty talking about relationships among themselves. During a discussion with the out-of-school girls, they claimed that they rarely had fights or quarrels, as they lived communally and shared many of their possessions – including money, glue for sniffing, and even sleeping space. Both the out-of-school girls and boys seemed to prefer communal living. The boys said they often spent time together, sharing stories, going for walks, visiting discos, or watching television or movies. According to Ochieng, a 14-year-old out-of-school boy, a disco session often culminated in sexual encounters with girls – suggesting that sexual intercourse was an integral part of the out-of-school children's lives.

Girls relating with girls

Schoolgirls described their relationships as cordial and indicated that they related well together as they helped each other with schoolwork, homework and duties, which included cleaning classrooms and the school compound. Apart from regular gossip, the girls claimed that they advised each other on how to succeed academically in order to avoid having to drop out of school to get married. They also discussed strategies on how to respond to boys who tried to cajole them into having sex, and who were likely to leave them once they became pregnant. The following are some interview excerpts showing the subjects that girls said dominated their discussions with each other:

Telling others to read hard (13-year-old girl)

Telling others not to walk out at night (13-year-old girl)

Encouraging one another to pass examinations (14-year-old girl)

We talk not to leave school and not to walk with boys, who want to make us pregnant (15-year-old girl).

The out-of-school girls expressed similar sentiments to those at school, saying their female peers were very close and important to them. As well as sharing their daily experiences and helping each other with domestic duties, these girls said they often pooled their resources to help each other out – especially in buying sanitary towels. In a few instances, however, contradictory claims emerged from some girls, suggesting strong rifts between several of them, as noted by Linga, a 15-year-old girl in Standard 8:

They [girls] have no good relationships. They don't like each other; they hate [each other]. Some like laughing and enjoying others.

Some of the girls observed that, despite their close and caring associations, "bad girls" could influence other girls into wearing "sexy clothes", attending discos and even engaging in sexual activities. As one 15-year-old girl said,

Some of the girls are bad. They go to hotels to dance in discos [and] influence others to join them and involve themselves in sexual relationships.

Another girl, a 16-year-old in Standard 8, reported that,

Girls walk together, don't wear good clothes, wear short ones [which] are transparent, and then go to discos together.

Many of the girls complained that teachers used privileged information about their social and sexual life, not to counsel, educate or guide them to become more responsible, but to harass them and label them as "prostitutes". Such behaviour, they implied, was likely to alienate the girls from the process of schooling.

Although boys described the relationships between girls as generally good, many of them were quick to accuse the girls of being gossips who tended to misinterpret relationships between the sexes as sexual. One 13-year-old boy, for example, claimed that,

They [girls] like gossiping about who is who's boyfriend.

And another 15-year-old boy said,

When they [girls] see a girl talking with a boy, they think bad [ie. they are involved sexually].

From such observations, relationships within the sexes emerge as relatively amicable. Notably, gossiping was perceived as a gendered activity that applied only to girls,

exonerating the boys from such trivial pursuits. Fighting over relationships was reported mainly among boys, who were portrayed as being under pressure to prove their physical strength as a quality that girls found attractive. In this context, the girls emerged as meek and, hence, in need of relationships with boys who could protect them from other boys as they travelled between home and school. Such protectionist tendencies offered the boys relative power over the girls, from whom they could ask favours in return – even in the form of sex.

Relationships with the Opposite Sex

Girls talking about relationships between boys and girls

During the interviews and focus group discussions with pupils, girls indicated that they related with boys in different ways, which included playing together and discussing homework, especially mathematics. However, the girls claimed that some of these friendships were intimate and involved sexual activities. Such intimacy was, reportedly, commonplace within and outside school, where boys were observed "specialising" in a single girl as a mate or girlfriend. In a girl's interview, one Standard 8 girl claimed that,

> **Boys and girls go to dance together, influence others to join them, involve themselves in sexual relationships.**

Another older girl observed,

> **Some of the boys specialise in one girl [and] keep their girls whom they help in assignments.**

In the girls' discussions, a girl named Peris was identified as being popular for having intimate relationships with a particular boy in her class. One of her classmates explained:

> **Peris has a boyfriend in Class 7. They talk together, sit together, and are always writing letters to each other.**

Because having boyfriends was considered a precursor or an indicator of sexual activity, it is not surprising that most of the girls denied having boyfriends. Moreover, as sexual intercourse was only acceptable between adults, the girls claimed that they did not engage in sex because they were still young and wished to complete their education without interruptions, through pregnancy or contracting STIs. They presented logical arguments that portrayed sexual relationships as detrimental to their school performance and completion, pointing out unequivocally that such friendships often involved sex, which could result in pregnancy and subsequently in dropping out of school. One 15-year-old girl, Mwene, constructed herself as a "sensible" girl, saying,

> **I have no friends of the opposite sex. Boys can mislead [girls] to follow them and leave school. If I have a boyfriend, I can't read and may not come to school.**

The fear of dropping out of school because of pregnancy seemed very real, despite communal knowledge that adolescent girls and boys did engage in sexual intercourse. In fact, such fears seemed to supersede concern about the risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

Because of the stigma attached to premarital sex and the labelling of sexually active girls as immoral, girls who were implicated in sexual partnerships understandably denied the accusations. This sort of denial is captured in an interview with Kale, a Standard 8 girl, who had been identified by teachers and other pupils as having a boyfriend. Interestingly, Kale constructed herself as a determined girl ready to salvage her dented image, amid strong indications that she was sexually involved with a boy in her school:


Interviewer: **How about you, do you have a boyfriend?**

Kale: **I have been having but I spoilt the friendship.**

Interviewer: **When was that?**

Kale: **This year.**

Interviewer: **Why?**

Kale: **Vile niliona tu, alikuwa ananiharibia wakati wangu [From what I observed, he was wasting my time]. Badala ya kukaa pamoja, *yeye alikuwa tu ananiambia story zingine* [Instead of sitting together, he was telling me other stories, suggesting having sex]. *Nikamwambia badala ya hiyo* story *ndio tuwe tukisoma pamoja, hiyo* story *uwache* [I told him, instead of those stories, let us be revising together, and to desist from telling me such things].**

Interviewer: ***Alikuwa anakwambia story gani?*** **[What stories was he telling you?]**

Kale: ***Tuwe friendship, so I told him no*** **[That we become friends, so I told him 'No'].**

Interviewer: ***Akafanyaje*** **[What did he do?]**

Kale: ***So now akaachana na hizo stories*** **[He left those stories].**

Interviewer:	**Now how is he… do you still share papers?**
Kale:	**Yes. We only do sums together.**
Interviewer:	***Umewahi kukuwa na mwingine pia*** **[Have you had another one?]**
Kale:	***Hapana*** **[No].**

In their attempts to seduce the girls, boys were said to offer them money and other material gifts. Thus, boys were constructed not only as the physical protectors and helpers of girls, but also as their financial and material providers. This gendering of sexual relationships sets a strong foundation for the gendering of future relationships in adult life, in which women would be constructed as the dependants of their male partners, thereby polarising masculinities and femininities.

Girls indicated that they liked to be associated with "well behaved" boys who worked hard in school and did not drop out. While some of them said they liked to associate with boys who were "hard" (tough) and who escorted them home, there were those who did not want any association with boys, especially those whom they thought took alcohol or drugs, loitered or "played" with girls. Linga was one girl who said she abhorred any relationship with boys, declaring that,

All boys are the same – and bad.

Boys talking about relationships between girls and boys

The construction of boys as the active providers and protectors of girls also emerged in the boys' discussions, as they addressed the issue of relationships with the opposite sex. The boys also portrayed themselves as potential owners of their girlfriends, whom, according to their personal testimonies, they acquired as commodities and could discard at will.

One of the boys claimed that boys "cheated" girls so that they could have sex with them. Bokelo, who was a participant in one of the FGDs, said some of the boys dated girls, took them to clubs and had sex with them afterwards. Notably, even with the persistent claims about young people engaging in sexual activities, hardly any of them admitted to involvement in an ongoing sexual relationship. Like the girls, the boys talked only about past relationships with girls, claiming that at the time of the interview they did not have any girlfriends. It is in this context that one 13-year-old Standard 7 boy narrated what he termed as a past experience with a girlfriend:

Interviewer: Are you yourself involved in such a relationship?

Boy: I was, but not these days.

Interviewer: You were? When were you involved in such a relationship?

Boy: When I was in Standard 4.

Interviewer: You were in 4A2?

Boy: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, so you had a girlfriend?

Boy: Yes.

Interviewer: So what did you use to do with your girlfriend?

Boy: We used to play together.

Interviewer: You used to play together?

Boy: Yes, in the dark.

Interviewer: In the dark?

Boy: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes?

Boy: And we would go, even to the toilet... yeah... together.

Interviewer: You go to the toilets together?

Boy: Yes, we were eating with one spoon.

Interviewer: You were eating with one spoon?

Boy: Yes.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Boy:	**No.**
Interviewer:	**Okay, ahh... Why did you have a girlfriend at that time?**
Boy:	**That time I was given by her cousin.**

Here the girlfriend is portrayed as an exchange commodity for the boys:


Interviewer:	**You were given that girlfriend by that girl's cousin?**
Boy:	**Yes.**
Interviewer:	**What did the cousin tell you?**
Boy:	**He saw me with a lot of money and then he asked me... if I would like a girlfriend... I said yes, yah, that is when he gave me.**
Interviewer:	**That is when he gave you the girlfriend?**
Boy:	**Yes.**
Interviewer:	**Okay, how long was she your girlfriend?**
Boy:	**When I reached Standard 6, yeah, she came to be going to other boys...**
Interviewer:	**And then you said you don't want her? That is when you stopped having the relationship?**
Boy:	**Yes.**
Interviewer:	**Okay, now because you have already had a girlfriend... what are some of the qualities that you look for in a girlfriend?**
Boy:	**The way she works, the way she is neat, and the way she talks.**
Interviewer:	**The way she works, the way she is neat, and the way she talks?**
Boy:	**Yeah, and the way she plans her things.**

The idea of boys 'giving away' and 'receiving' a girl strikingly portrays the boys' construction of femininity as passive *vis-à-vis* the active, pursuing and controlling nature of masculinity. Describing how boys distinguished intimate relationships between peers of the opposite sex, the boy interviewees revealed that:

- **Boys and girls often talked about love in class (even when the teacher was teaching), touched each other, gave each other money, and went home holding hands;**
- **Boys took care of their girlfriends so that no one else touched them;**
- **Couples were often seen holding hands and kissing;**
- **Boys and girls went to discos, had sex, and sometimes discussed their homework together.**

Although the boys denied having girlfriends at the time of the interviews, they all seemed conversant with the ways of intimate relationships, as well as the consequences of engaging in sexual intercourse. However, they attributed their status to their mothers, whom they said urged them to complete their schooling before pursuing potential girlfriends. One of the boys underscored that,

> **Mothers said 'No' and I don't want to waste my time in school.**

An out-of-school boy even referred to the Ten Commandments as he stressed why he could not have a girlfriend:

> **I don't like girls. It is a waste of time. I am not of age, and it is against the Commandments.**

One 15-year-old boy expressed concern about making girls pregnant, which would result in them losing their education and even being alienated by their parents:

> **They [boys and girls] may do sex and girls get pregnant, leave school, [and their] parents chase them from home.**

To a few boys, however, having a girlfriend was acceptable, as long as they abstained from sex. The few boys who said that they would consider having girlfriends described their ideal partners as those who were morally upright, academically gifted and religious. Many of the boys said they did not like girls who tended to cross gender boundaries, assuming 'boyish' behaviour such as whistling or using bad language. Girls who were reputed gossips were also not considered ideal girlfriends. Although there were variations between individual preferences, potential girlfriends had to 'fit' within the stereotypical framework of femininity by portraying a sense of dependence and submissiveness to boys. According to one 14-year-old Standard 7 boy, character was a key consideration in a girlfriend:

She should have good manners, even if she is not beautiful, [she] should be a born again Christian.

Another 14-year-old boy said:

The girl should love me the way I am… [should] not like money, knows how to take care of things, is trustworthy, and does not gossip.

Asked what their parents said about having girlfriends, most of the boys said they were warned against involving themselves in such relationships until they had completed school. In addition, their parents reportedly cautioned them against keeping company with children who engaged in such relationships, and who were likely to influence them. Many boys said their parents' advice helped them to remain focused on their schooling and on working hard. Some claimed they had seen people go 'haywire' – implying girls becoming pregnant, and even boys contracting STIs and HIV – by involving themselves in sexual relationships. For some boys, however, the role of their parents in guiding them through the process of dating and having relationships with the opposite sex was not clear, as they claimed their parents told them nothing on the issue. One of the boys complained that,

Father doesn't talk [to boys] about girls.

From these discussions, it is evident that although the girls and boys claimed not to have boyfriends or girlfriends, they were nonetheless well informed about the nature of heterosexual relationships and the implications of these relationships. It is important to note that, even though some girls and boys who were identified as having intimate relationships vehemently denied this, they were not necessarily lying but, rather, creatively constructing themselves in the light of the researchers. When responding to these issues, some of the girls appeared shy, while others kept quiet or avoided the conversation altogether. Note how 14-year-old Dina responds to the following questions:

Interviewer:	**How about you? Do you have a boyfriend?**
Dina:	**Ehh… no… no.**
Interviewer:	**Mhhh? (Looks down before offering her the chance to respond again).**
Dina:	**Mwene has one. I do not have.**
Interviewer:	**Why?**
Dina:	**It is bad. They [boyfriends] can make you pregnant.**

Relationships between Pupils and their Teachers

Boys talking about relationships with male teachers

Boys claimed that, generally, they related well with their teachers during learning activities. In particular, the boys considered male teachers to be their allies, with whom they could discuss personal problems related to schooling. One of the female teachers also noted that male teachers helped boys with their schoolwork and even discussed social problems with them. However, during FGDs with boys only, the male teachers were accused of behaving unfairly by favouring girls over the boys, especially in the administration of punishments and the allocation of school duties, which the boys claimed were weighted in favour of the girls. These allegations of unequal and discriminatory treatment of boys suggest that some of the teachers perceived and constructed boys and girls as essentially different: a tendency that is likely to influence young people's attitudes towards the nature of masculinities and femininities.

The boys' group discussions invariably portrayed male teachers as interested only in teaching girls, whom they allegedly picked on to answer questions in class. Some boys expressed disappointment at the male teachers, whom they accused of treating girls as more clever than boys – even when the girls provided the wrong answers. The boys expressed a feeling of disillusionment and claimed not to enjoy participating in class. This raises serious concerns about potential conflicts in the boys' school lives, considering that many of them had identified the male teachers as possible allies with whom they could identify. A 14-year-old Standard 7 schoolboy said that, because of this unfavourable situation, boys tended to fear male teachers and often avoided participating in class. One of the female teachers seemed to confirm the boys' claims when she observed that boys were relatively freer with the female teachers, and often sought counselling and guidance from them.

However, one of the male teachers refuted the boys' claims, arguing that male teachers related well with boys because he had seen boys "showing respect" to them. In this context, it might be assumed that the teacher did not distinguish the boys' expression of fear from the purported respect that the male teachers perceived.

Girls talking about relationships with male teachers

During a focus group discussion with girls, it was claimed that at least one of the three male teachers had expressed an explicit preference for girls over boys. The girls confirmed that this particular teacher treated boys as though they were not part of his class, claiming that even when the boys raised their hands in class to participate, the teacher would deliberately ignore them and choose one of the girls to respond.

Relationships between male teachers and girls

As reported by both the boys and girls, relationships between male teachers and girls were complicated by the alleged favouritism and sexual objectification and abuse of the

girls. Individual interviews with girls confirmed the perception that male teachers tended to favour them over boys in class, by for example choosing to mark their work before that of the boys, while at the same time teasing them in a sexual manner. Despite the alleged open favouritism of girls, it is ironic that the male teachers persistently annoyed the girls by constructing them as sexual commodities from which boys could freely take their pick. Such behaviour from the male teachers could have prompted the boys to imagine that the teachers were implicitly their allies in sexualising the girls, even while they expressed open hostility towards them.

However, even with the purported favouritism, most of the girls did not seem to be impressed with the male teachers, claiming they did not trust them enough to discuss their personal problems with them. The girls complained bitterly about one male teacher, whom they accused of regularly insinuating that they were available for sexual intimacy, and chanting things like "*msichana amepoa* [that girl is cool]". They also claimed that, instead of addressing the girls' problems, most male teachers simply laughed at them. The girls charged that, unlike their female teachers, the male teachers often accused them of pretending when they complained of being ill.

One of the male teachers was described as being notorious in pursuing girls, asking them about their family background, and even using privileged information to embarrass and humiliate them in public. This teacher apparently gave girls derogatory nicknames such as *maste pu, mabootkoo* and *mastepu*, suggesting that they were not feminine in the way they took long strides and wore masculine boots. The girls further accused the teacher of making them walk back and forth in front of the class, as he watched them closely with his eyes locked on theirs. They claimed this teacher awarded extra marks to girls who quenched his appetite for girls parading in the classroom. The teacher had reportedly suggested that girls had no business being at school, as their destiny lay solely in marriage. One of the girls said,

> **Male teachers tells girls funny things, like they are beautiful. There is this teacher, one who calls girls at break time to his office. (The insinuation is that he has sexual motives in doing this).**

Another girl claimed that,

> **Male teachers stare at girls for a long time and at times beat girls more.**

Sexualising the girls during class also emerged in allegations by the male teachers that some of the girls were sexually involved with men outside the school. According to one girl, a male teacher often suggested that he would marry the girls because they were sexually experienced, saying:

> **'*Mumeonjwa* [you have been tasted], and I will take you to Meru [the teacher's homeland]...'**

The girls accused this teacher of ignoring the boys, while only paying attention to the girls. According to one of the girl interviewees, the teacher often referred to the girls as '*Ma girls*' ('my girls'):

> **Even if the answer from the girls was wrong, he said that it was right. He annoys boys. Boys feel rejected and don't take their books for marking. He says arguing is part of life. He calls one girl, [saying] 'Mwelu, Mwelu, Mwelu is a brown fat girl'. If you talked to him badly, he won't mark your books. He wants to know where girls stay, wants to be their friend. He wants to see your home. He always asks 'Where do you stay?' If he knows, he will come. He says 'Kibera girls are dirty, I like other girls'.**

This comment encapsulates the perceptions that many of the girls had of this male teacher, who clearly spent valuable teaching time humiliating them and constructing them as worthless sexual objects. It is little wonder that such a classroom culture disillusioned many girls, who found it easier to stay away from school. It is also unsurprising that, due to the blatant harassment of girls and misuse of learning time, many of the girls expressed a loathing of male teachers in general. Surprisingly, many of the boys interpreted the male teachers' attention to girls as "favours" that they themselves coveted. According to the boys, some girls openly feared and hated male teachers, as well as the subjects that they taught. However, a few girls were perceived to enjoy what the boys described as "kindness" from male teachers, who sent them to their houses to wash dishes. In these houses, it was alleged that the teachers offered the girls spiked drinks, had sex with them, and sometimes made them pregnant. Some of the boys also claimed that, even though the school rules prohibited pupils from leaving school at lunchtime, the male teachers liked sending girls to the nearby shops to buy their lunch, and at times followed the girls and sexually harassed them.

The fact that boys interpreted such exploitative acts as "kindness" is ironic, and can only be understood in the context of the bitterness they might have felt for being emasculated by the powerful male teachers as they competed for sexual attention from their girl classmates. The following excerpt from an interview with a 14 year-old Standard 7 girl called Mwelu (referred to in the excerpt above) captures a glimpse of the classroom culture in the Nairobi school, as she described it:

Mwelu: **The teacher likes talking bad language in the class to the girls.**

Interviewer: **How?**

Mwelu: **When they [male teachers] marry you, they will take**

	you to Meru... (laughs) And they tell us that our parents just take girls to come to school to just stay there and grow up... when we finish the school we go to be married.
Interviewer:	**What else?**
Mwelu:	**When you tell the man teachers, don't talk bad language in the class, he just takes it serious and then he don't want to mark your book again.**

Clearly, the male teachers were portrayed as employing a complex combination of abuse of power as people in whose care parents and the community had entrusted their children. Undoubtedly, the male teachers were using their perceived masculine superiority coupled with their power as teachers and adults to intimidate their pupils – particularly the girls – and even went so far as refusing to mark their class assignments. In the interview with Mwelu, it appeared that some girls even had to seek the assistance of other teachers to mark their work:

Interviewer:	**Will he mark your book again?**
Mwelu:	**Yes... and when you do a test... when we do a test... another teacher marked... another teacher advises him and then he marks for you.**
Interviewer:	**He marks for you?**
Mwelu:	**Yes.**
Interviewer:	**Is this one teacher who does that or many teachers?**
Mwelu:	**I have heard of many teachers.**
Interviewer:	**Who tell girls like that?**
Mwelu:	**Yes.**

The interviewer discerned Mwelu's strong feelings of resentment as she continued to narrate the girl's plight in class:


Interviewer: **When they say like that, what do you feel?**

Mwelu: **I feel like standing and beating him.**

Interviewer: **How about the other girls?**

Mwelu: **They just talk... they just talk and the teacher goes out.**

Interviewer: **Talk so the teacher can hear, or just murmur among themselves?**

Mwelu: **They talk loud.**

Interviewer: **What do they tell the teacher?**

Mwelu: **Tell the teacher that, 'You don't like teaching. You like talking bad language in the class...'**

Interviewer: **What does the teacher do?**

Mwelu: **The teacher just laughs and starts teaching.**

Notably, from Mwelu's viewpoint, the boys in the class were usually sidelined as passive spectators in such discussions. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that, in these cases, the male teachers were sowing, in the boys, negative, exploitative and oppressive attitudes towards girls and women, which could easily develop into misogynistic treatment in their future as adult men:

Interviewer: **How about to boys? How does he [the male teacher] relate to boys? Does he say anything bad to boys?**

Mwelu: **No, nothing. He just leaves the boys out...**

Sexual harassment in school is a serious issue punishable under the Teachers' Code of Conduct in Kenya. Apparently, however, the code is rarely enforced, and clearly the Nairobi schoolgirls did not seem to know how to seek redress when harassed sexually by their teachers. This anomaly highlights the obvious lack of effective civic and rights education within the country's education system.

Because of the problems outlined by these girls, it is understandable that they preferred to report personal problems to the (male) deputy head-teacher, who they found to be relatively amicable and responsive to their needs.

Despite the girls' accusations, one of the male teachers argued that they related well with their female pupils, although he admitted that some of the adolescent girls shied away from them. He argued that male teachers preferred to send girls to buy them snacks or lunch – despite this being against school regulations – because they presumed the girls to be more clean and hygienic and less clumsy than the boys. In an attempt to exonerate the male teachers from the allegations of harassment, the teacher explained that the girls' problems were related to the onset of puberty and, therefore, not directly linked to their relationships with the male teachers. Very subtly, this teacher appeared to be blaming the girls themselves for being harassed by the teachers. He was at pains to portray himself as being friendly to the younger girls, clearly diverting attention from the relatively older ones whom he taught and saying:

> **In lower primary, the girls would like to be close to me and this is something that I have noticed.**

From the foregoing, it is clear that classrooms were venues in which teachers, in particular male teachers, harassed and intimidated their female pupils who lacked the life skills to respond appropriately and effectively. One male teacher emerged as a particular culprit in abusing his position and his masculinity to sexually abuse female pupils, while at the same time relegating boys to a passive role in the classroom. The boys for their part saw the girls as being favoured, hence justifying their feelings of animosity towards both them and the male teachers. Such gendered and sexualised situations are likely to create disaffection in the boys – towards authority, towards the opposite sex, and towards education in general.

Relationships between female teachers and boys

Many of the boys claimed that they related well with their female teachers, while others said that they had no relationships whatsoever. One boy reported problems between the boys and female teachers, apparently because they did not fear the women teachers. One of the girls confirmed this view when she claimed that some female teachers were actually afraid of the boys, pointing out that some boys were relatively big and strong and thus capable of "beating up" the female teachers. Despite this observation, many of the girls readily concurred that the female teachers were good to the boys, helping and advising them on various issues related to their schooling. A female teacher agreed that their relationship with male pupils was comparatively better than that of boys and male teachers. Another noted that the boys felt relatively free to discuss their problems with the female teachers.

However, in the girl-only discussions, it was claimed that some of the female teachers had sexual relationships with male pupils – an allegation that is rare in primary schools in

Kenya. However, the researchers were not able to pursue this claim further during their fieldwork.

Relationships between female teachers and girls

Although both boys and girls said the female pupils enjoyed a good relationship with their female teachers, many boys accused the female teachers of favouring girls over boys – particularly in giving them lighter punishments for the same offences. The girls, however, rationalised the alleged favouritism by constructing girlhood differently from boyhood, and arguing that girls' obedience to teachers influenced the administration of punishments. Linda, a 15 year-old girl, observed that when the teachers sent the boys on errands, they tended to be delayed on the way, unlike girls:

> **Girls obey and listen to them [the teachers]. When they are sent, they come back quickly.**

The girls also said they enjoyed good relationships with their female teachers, who provided them with practical advice on how to succeed in life by avoiding boys and "bad company". However, by linking success with the avoidance of boys, the female teachers were also actively participating in the polarisation of femininity and masculinity, making it appear immoral to establish boy-girl friendships based upon mutual interests.

In a focus group discussion with girls, there was consensus that, even though the female teachers sometimes abused girls, the girls believed that they still liked them and were genuinely interested in their success. In addition, the girls claimed that female teachers, unlike their male colleagues, appeared concerned about the health of the girls and even bought medicine and lunch for those who were sick. Such acts of benevolence and sensitivity seemed to have strongly boosted the girls' trust and confidence in their female teachers.

Some of the boys seemed to have different opinions about the relationships between girls and female teachers. Several felt that the female teachers were not genuinely good to the girls because they allegedly revealed "secrets" that the girls had told them. However, neither the girls nor the teachers confirmed the boys' perceptions.

According to the male teachers in the study, female teachers treated schoolgirls as they would their own daughters, displaying a strong interest in instilling discipline more effectively in them than in the boys. One female teacher confirmed this analysis, saying that women teachers were better counsellors to the girls than to the boys.

Relationships between Parents and Children

Fathers and their daughters

As reported by both the boys and the girls, the nature of the relationships between fathers and daughters was judged as "good" depending on the father's capability to

provide basic needs such as shelter, education, protection and general advice on how to conduct themselves. The boys observed that caring fathers forbad their daughters from wearing "bad clothes" such as miniskirts and tight trousers. The fathers were thought to believe that such clothes were provocative and could lead to the harassment of their daughters. Many of the boys described fathers as much more protective of their daughters than their sons. For example, unlike sons, daughters were not allowed to "roam outside" after dark – thus locating the morality of 'roaming' not in itself but in the gender of the child.

Sexual abuse and violence against girls in the home was raised during the individual interviews and focus group discussions with girls, who persistently accused some fathers of having sexual relationships with – and even raping – their daughters. A 15-year-old Standard 7 schoolgirl advised that,

> **Girls should not be left at home with their fathers because he can rape…**

Some of the girls declared that they hated their fathers for being regularly absent, physically and verbally abusive, overburdening them with chores, and punishing them unfairly. Wanjiku, a 14-year-old girl, confirmed such dislike for her father:

> **I do not like my father, and don't stay with him. He beats me and makes noise every time.**

One 14-year-old girl said that fathers used money to entice their daughters to have sex with them, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:


Interviewer:	**In your opinion, how should relationships between fathers and daughters be?**
Girl:	**Not [to] take daughters as their wives. [They] should behave as fathers.**
Interviewer:	**What do you mean?**
Girl:	**When left home alone and you are a girl, they tell you that… something you have never heard…**
Interviewer:	**Like?**
Girl:	**Do you know my daughter, I love you… something like… uuhh… when he talks to you, he gives you 100 shillings to buy what you need, and yet, it is your mother who is supposed to do that.**

	(The girl stops to reflect, looks up and appears to be thinking deeply)
Interviewer:	**It is bad to be given 100 shillings by fathers?**
Girl:	**Yes, fathers have sex with their daughters, and tell them not to tell anybody.**

During this interview, the researcher felt that the girl was talking from personal experience, as she appeared to be searching her memory to narrate the situation. From the girl's explanation, it seemed that fathers – like male teachers – could be guilty of abusing their positions of trust. It is thus not surprising that some of the girls did not find emotional or physical security in their fathers, while a few expressed outright loathing of their fathers.

Fathers and their sons

Relationships between fathers and boys clearly centred on common constructions of masculinities, as the fathers helped their sons to mature into heterosexual men of good character. A boy who was out of school explained that fathers always discouraged sexual relations between boys, which they described as "devilish". One of the girls depicted the making of men from boys as a serious undertaking for fathers, who occasionally had to resort to corporal punishment to ensure that their sons developed into decent, socially acceptable men who were capable of heading their families.

Mothers and their daughters

Both the boys and girls reported that mothers related well with their daughters, mainly because the girls worked as the mothers' domestic assistants, with whom they shared the housework and all other domestic duties. Both boys and girls also observed mothers counselling and advising their daughters, in ways that often resembled the relationships observed between fathers and sons.

Not all the girls, however, perceived mothers as having good relationships with their daughters. A few claimed that mothers could be violent towards their daughters, whom they exploited by treating as substitute parents and eventually married off. As one 14-year-old girl said,

Mothers beat their daughters and force them into marriage.

Although many girls did not talk specifically about their relationships with their own mothers, their descriptions provided a clear indication of their general perceptions.

Mothers and their sons

The boys and girls described mothers as being often concerned about the sexual maturity of their children. While the boys' movements away from home were relatively less restricted, mothers advised them against staying out late and having sex with girls.

Comparatively, and in a clearly gendered parenting style, when not in school, girls were reportedly confined to the home under the close supervision of their parents and other relatives. However, it was claimed that many adolescent boys did not listen to their mothers because they perceived themselves to be "big" and beyond parental policing. Several of the mothers confirmed this arrogant attitude towards them, and claimed that, when boys were in their teens, many fathers assumed the role of parenting their sons.

There were interesting moments during the interviews with parents when fathers tended to dominate and sideline their wives. In one instance, a father 'gate-crashed' his wife's interview and silenced her as she explained how she reared her sons. This father proceeded to confess how, as a father, he had failed to educate their sons at what he perceived to be the appropriate time, only to try and attempt to salvage his role when it was too late to help, especially in matters of sexuality. He explained,

> **We [fathers] don't involve ourselves [with educating our sons] till it is too late.**

He went on to elaborate as follows:

> **Boys, *hakuna siku hizi. Hata mimi* ['Sexuality education is not there nowadays, even with myself]. I only did it [gave advice] last year to my children who are in secondary… I saw I was late because I did not help. *Watoto damu yao iko moto siku hizi* [Children nowadays have hot blood]. You get late when you think they don't know anything. Very few people do this. Why? Even in the reserve… they see they have educated somebody and they think the person is learned, but *hajaelewa mwili yake ni mila zetu* [they do not understand their body, our customs]. They don't even fear their brothers and sisters (referring to sexual reverence among relatives).**

This father provides a good example of the apparent vacuum that exists in the parenting of many Nairobi boys, with fathers readily acknowledging their failures, while at the same time expecting that their sons will somehow grow up to become men and effective family heads. With the apparent blurring of the roles of mothers and fathers in transforming their sons into men, boys were often left with little choice but to rely on the haphazard education offered by either parent. The basic content of 'masculinity education' was clearly focused on becoming the family head and providing for the family and aged parents.

Only a few of the parents in focus group discussions claimed to have good relationships with their children, saying they were able to give them practical advice about life in adulthood. However, some mothers claimed that circumstances forced them to spend considerable time with their children of both sexes, as the fathers were either absent or arrived home late in the night. Although some parents alleged that not all mothers set good examples for their daughters, it was generally agreed that girls and boys often had only their mothers to turn to for advice. As one mother explained,

Mothers try hard to bring up the children well and are more concerned. Some fathers really don't care; they are lazy and idle.

The findings presented on the various forms of relationships among children, and between children and their duty bearers, indicate that children tend to relate differently in different social contexts and with different categories of family members. However, the tendency of some fathers to become emotionally attached to their daughters was criticised, with some mothers claiming that their husbands loved their daughters more than they loved their wives.

Sex and Sexuality

Boys choosing boyhood

All the boys and most of the girls interviewed preferred their own sex. It was clear from their explanations that the often positive construction of masculinities as comprising courage, intelligence, social privileges and presumed power over girls were among the qualities that influenced the boys' preferences for boyhood. For instance, Masinde, a 14-year-old Standard 7 boy, expressed his preference as follows:

I would like to be a boy because girls respect you and I will inherit property from my father.

To many boys, freedom from domestic drudgery was a major attraction of boyhood, as explained by one 11-year-old boy:

I would like to remain a boy because boys play with other boys, and not a girl because she washes dirty things in the house.

Girls choosing girlhood

In comparison with boys, most girls expressed their preference for remaining girls, emphasising the virtues culturally associated with femininity and motherhood, such as care, nurturance, honesty and sensitivity. They also cited the ability to take care of themselves and of young children. A few girls revealed a tinge of vanity as they described girls as physically more attractive than boys.

Only two girls, aged 13 and 15, said they would prefer to be boys, observing that boys did not get pregnant and were exempted from domestic chores. These reasons focused on the privileges of masculinity over femininity, indicating that the girls were conscious of being discriminated against through an act of nature, which made girlhood unattractive to them.

Sexuality Education

Sources and content of sexuality education

Although many pupils accused their parents of shying away from sexuality education, they indicated that they were not entirely ignorant about the related issues. Most of

them, however, relied on teachers, peers, cousins and older siblings as important sources of education on sex and sexuality. A few of the girls identified their mothers as key advisors on how to maintain sexual health and avoid pregnancy, mainly by abstaining from sexual intercourse.

Of concern was the finding from of the out-of-school children who claimed that they did not receive any education on sexuality from responsible adults. Hence, they relied on information from their peers, who undoubtedly also needed to be educated on the relevant issues affecting young peoples' sexual lives.

One mother claimed that it was only after her daughters had started menstruating that she discussed with them issues related to pregnancy, thus indicating her lack of concern about other issues of sexual health, including STIs and HIV. With her sons, she had discussed physical bodily changes such as the breaking of the voice. However, again, she had not advised her sons on matters of sex, pregnancy or sexual health. This mother tried to exonerate herself from blame by claiming she was shy to raise issues of sexuality with her children. Other mothers interviewed also confessed their inability to address sexuality issues with their children – thus raising pressing concerns about the role of parents in helping their sons and daughters to mature sexually.

The link between sexual maturation and the onset of adulthood was an issue that many mothers felt needed to be addressed. They were of the view that sexual intercourse was an exclusive activity for adults and, therefore, adolescents needed advice on how to conduct their sexual lives at the onset of puberty without indulging in sexual intercourse. One of the mothers said she had cautioned her daughters not to think that the physical changes they were experiencing were an indication that they were entering adulthood and were therefore entitled to engage in sexual activities.

Educating young people on matters of sexuality was perceived to be largely a gendered affair, with fathers claiming to focus on their sons as the mothers concentrated on their daughters. Despite the observation by most of the girls and boys that fathers were often absent from the family homes, it was commonplace for the participating fathers to portray themselves as rulers who were in control of their families and judges of the perceived sexual indulgence among young people. In response to a question on the role of parents in sexuality education, one father said,

> **I have told my wife that the day any of the girls gets pregnant, she packs her things and goes with her daughter, anywhere but not my home.**

The majority of the parents noted that mothers were more concerned with sexuality matters affecting their children, even though they were usually unable to address the issues adequately. Confirming these claims, some of the girls said that many mothers appeared shy and only talked to children about boyfriends and girlfriends, urging them to

avoid such relationships but without providing concrete reasons why. The mothers reportedly urged their children to behave in morally upright ways, including the avoidance of "bad company" that might influence them to have sex, discos and beer clubs, or "roaming" in local estates. Some girls said their mothers approved of friends of the opposite sex, as long as they did not involve sexual relationships. As one girl aged 12 in Standard 7 commented,

> **It is good advice; boys can rape you.**

According to one 14-year-old Standard 8 boy, mothers were the right people to educate their daughters, as they had themselves experienced girlhood and adolescence. He explained,

> **Mothers know what they are saying as they have passed through that stage.**

Assuming the role of advisor and constructing girls as relatively more vulnerable than boys, a 15-year-old Standard 8 boy warned that,

> **Girls should be very careful and avoid being cheated by boys for money.**

Since many of the children who were out of school did not live with their biological parents, it seemed that some of them had only their maternal grandparents to guide them on sexual matters. According to these children, this guidance focused on the avoidance of relationships with the opposite sex or with older people who had the potential to mislead the youth into engaging in sexual intercourse and/or drug taking. The researchers noted that some of the out-of-school girls did not wish to discuss sexuality, claiming they were too young to address such issues. This was despite the fact that they were all young adolescents. Nevertheless, many of their peers expressed the wish to acquire literacy skills and to learn more about HIV/AIDS and pregnancy as a way of enhancing and safeguarding their sexual health.

The few parents who reported that they discussed sexuality issues with their children said they focused generally on STIs, HIV and AIDS, menstruation and other physical changes that occurred at puberty. Mothers tended to stress abstinence and the avoidance of pregnancy rather than responding to the challenges posed by sexual desire and offering advice on safe and responsible sexual behaviour. Interestingly, some mothers accused their husbands of threatening them with divorce if they "allowed" their daughters to become pregnant. The mothers confessed that, in order to ensure peace in their families, they tended to transfer such threats to their daughters, hoping that they would take heed. One mother admitted that,

> **I tell [my daughters] that if you give birth, it is your problem to take care of the baby and not mine.**

Some of the parents resisted openly the idea of teaching sexuality education to their children, arguing that this should be the role of the schools and other resource groups. This suggestion raises serious concerns about how to bridge the family and school on sensitive but crucial education issues such as sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

Gaps and constraints in sexuality education

Although many of the boys and girls described the education they had received on sexuality issues as inadequate, unlike the Garissa pupils they did not seek further information from the researchers. One of the girls, however, claimed that many girls wished to know more about how the menstrual cycle functioned, in order to better manage their sexual lives and fully understand the processes of getting pregnant. They also wanted more detailed knowledge on the nature of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

The group interviews revealed that most parents lacked sufficient communication skills for conversing with their children on sensitive matters related to sex and sexuality. This explains why many of the children might have perceived their parents to be shy when addressing such issues. It also clarifies why many parents were against the idea of being the ones to educate their children on sexuality issues.

Our findings suggest that it is partly because of the inadequate training of teachers and the relatively low education of parents that these two groups usually adopt a moralising and intimidating approach to educating young people on sexuality matters – usually by prescribing a list of 'dos' and 'don'ts', accompanied by related threats and warnings.

HIV/AIDS Issues in Education

Awareness and knowledge

All the children who were interviewed in Nairobi claimed that they had at least heard of HIV and AIDS. The children described HIV/AIDS as a deadly disease with no known cure, and said that everyone was at risk. They also knew several means of transmission, which they identified as sexual intercourse, sharing needles and razor blades with infected persons, and the transfusion of contaminated blood.

However, even with the evidence of such knowledge, there were isolated but explicit misconceptions about how people could contract HIV. One girl, for instance, said that girls were more vulnerable to AIDS because they liked using chemicals on their faces and hair. While the idea that beauty chemicals could be contaminated with HIV seemed implausible, it was an indication of the existence of influential myths regarding the spread of AIDS in many Kenyan communities.

Gender identities, relationships and HIV/AIDS

Some of the young people clearly constructed their identities as sexual beings who were capable of and willing to attract interest in the opposite sex. However, considering that most of them did not have adequate life skills to deal with sexual desires and emotions, this temptation to test their perceived identities poses a real concern. For example, in the pursuit of popularity among boys, girls who were over-conceited about their physical and sexual maturity and attractiveness could easily fall prey to male sexual predators. Such girls could also be tempted to engage in sex as the only way they knew of impressing male suitors.

It was also claimed that girls who were seen as physically and sexually attractive faced relatively greater pressure from boys to prove their sexual capabilities and worth. In a bid to live up to their perceived image, such girls were likely to venture into having sex without considering the often grave consequences of disease and early pregnancy.

Fear of sexual maturation

Some of the boys and girls were of the view that the more they matured sexually, the more they would become exposed to HIV, AIDS and STIs. Several boys, for example, claimed that maturing sexually made them develop greater "emotions" towards girls, and encouraged them to start going to clubs and discos where they might strike up sexual liaisons. Thus, young people were becoming exposed to sexually transmitted infections at a very early age. As one 13-year-old boy in Standard 7 explained,

> **Because of emotions, you can see a girl, you feel like having sex with her. If you do, you may... uhh... get AIDS if she has it.**

Most of the girls concurred with the boys that sexual maturation could expose them to HIV/AIDS. They felt that pubescent girls were gullible and easy prey to the scheming of older boys or sugar daddies, who could be HIV-positive and were keen to engage young girls in risky sexual relations. One girl explained this as follows:

> **You can have feelings, then you start walking with someone who has HIV and you don't know [that they are infected].**

To a few girls, however, sexual maturation did not necessarily expose a person to HIV and AIDS. One 14-year-old girl, who was referred to as '*mwokovu'* ('saved Christian'), argued strongly that the major problem was the inability to resist sexual temptation.

Many of the girls also claimed that puberty brought physical changes that caused them considerable embarrassment, as boys laughed at their growing breasts and hips. In order to escape the embarrassment, one of the girls described how the majority of them concealed their breasts by wearing large sweaters all the time.

Most of the boys and girls said that both genders were vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of the immense temptation to experiment with sex, have several sexual partners, and attend social places such as clubs where they could be tempted to engage in drug taking or sex. A few girls and boys, however, indicated that boys were more vulnerable because, unlike the girls, boys were perceived to be promiscuous and had the capacity to have sex with many partners. Linga, a 15-year-old girl, believed that,

> **Boys like [having] girls in the morning; they have any girl and in the evening they have another girl.**

Many girls did not seem aware of the fact that being a faithful partner to a promiscuous boy rendered the faithful partner equally vulnerable to STIs and HIV/AIDS. Notably, only one of the girls portrayed a clear perception of the potential risks that sexually adventurous

boys posed to their girlfriends:

> **A boy sleeps with a girl today [and] tomorrow another, so long as he has money. He keeps on spreading [HIV/AIDS].**

Refuting the girls' claims, some of the boys counter-charged that girls were more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS than boys. While the boys did not provide reasons to support this charge, a few girls who supported them did. For example, one 15-year-old girl said of her fellow girl pupils:

> **They keep many boyfriends, they are easily cheated and if called by boys, they go quickly and do sex. Hence they can easily get AIDS.**

The issue of men having financial power over girls did not escape one 13-year-old girl, who suggested that some men exploited the financial needs of pubescent girls, to whom they offered material and monetary handouts in exchange for sexual favours. She observed that,

> **They [young girls] only need 50 shillings and they do sex. Girls are attracted by money.**

Many of the girls also claimed that some mothers engaged their teenage daughters in commercial sex, serving those men who preferred younger girls to their aged mothers. Although the researchers did not interrogate this matter further, findings from similar studies have found that this practice is commonplace especially in slum areas whereby poverty pushes parents to use all means at their disposal to earn a living (Chege & Mati, 1998). Analyses by Chege (2003) show that various reasons have been advanced to explain this phenomenon. Firstly, sexually inexperienced girls are perceived to be less likely to have sexually transmitted ailments and men see them as safe objects for sexual adventure. In addition, myths abound that relatively young girls have curative sexual powers to cleanse men who may be already infected with sexual diseases such as gonorrhoea or even AIDS. Further, men, especially in African communities are socialised to believe that, in order to rejuvenate themselves and enhance their sexual prowess, they needed to have sexual intercourse with women who were comparatively younger than themselves; the so-called 'young blood' syndrome (Chege 2001-2002, informal communication with African Kenyan men). Chege (2003) argues that such beliefs and practices by the sexually adventurous men are detrimental to the sexual health of girls and young women and that existing research findings should be used as a foundation for designing and implementing effective life skills to empower girls and women who find themselves ensnared in situations that are sexually exploitative.

According to many teachers, most of the boys and girls were sexually active, and thus faced similar chances of contracting HIV. Surprisingly, one of the teachers argued, quite erroneously, that girls had a weaker immune system that made them more prone to HIV infection. Another female teacher observed that, because girls became sexually active earlier than boys, they faced greater risks of contracting HIV. This teacher confirmed

that some of the mothers forced their daughters into prostitution and even set targets of how much money they expected the girls to earn each day.

Tradition, modernity and HIV/AIDS

Some of the traditional rituals of transition from childhood as described by participants from Kibera posed a significant risk to sexual and reproductive health. The rituals, reportedly performed under unhygienic conditions, included dental extraction among some Nilotic communities as well as circumcision of boys and genital surgical operations on girls from various ethnic backgrounds. Since the Kibera settlement is home to people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, it is impressive that the participating children were aware of the risks posed by some of the transition rituals they were likely to encounter. Like their children, the parents were critical of ritualistic circumcision, particularly for girls, which they described as hazardous to their sexual health.

In this community, the prevalence of the traditional practices of wife inheritance and polygamy posed a major threat to the sexual health of spouses and their offspring. The mothers criticised these practices, which they said encouraged the spread of HIV and AIDS. However, unlike their children, the parents denied that such practices were as prevalent in Kibera as they were in their rural and upcountry homes.

Problems of inadequate housing that required members of one family to reside in a single tiny room also posed great challenges for young people who were gradually maturing sexually, and who were at the crossroads of their transition to adulthood. In cases where the families were relatively financially capable, the parents reportedly rented rooms elsewhere for their adolescent children, thus offering them – perhaps unintentionally – unsupervised freedom to indulge in sexual and other activities. Such arrangements also exposed the daughters to sexual intruders, who could molest them without the intervention of parents or guardians.

The effects of urbanisation and modernity emerged clearly in the lives of the Kibera people, with many parents reportedly so preoccupied with meeting their basic survival needs, they hardly had any time for supervising their children. As one mother lamented,

> **Bringing up children in Kibera is in itself a risk. The housing arrangement has exposed children to many things. There is no privacy between children and their parents.**

Another mother expressed concern about the kind of information her children were exposed to while living unsupervised in the slum dwellings of Nairobi:

> **Our children know too much – many things that are beyond their age.**

A majority of the parents interviewed described Kibera as a harsh environment in which to bring up children. They complained that the “slum lifestyle” exposed children and young people to many social risks, including drugs, alcohol, glue, sexual assault, theft,

pornographic literature and movies, which could be viewed for as little as 5 Kenyan shillings.

The abuse of alcohol, drugs and glue sniffing elicited considerable concern from parents, who argued that such behaviour made it risky, particularly for girls, to walk about at night, as they feared becoming targets of sexual abuse or being lured into drug taking and peddling.

As was observed in the urban community in Garissa, subjects from Kibera also tended to link modern lifestyles to particular modes of dressing that appealed to girls, including tight and transparent clothing. Notably, men's and boys' clothing did not raise any criticism. However, tight and transparent female clothing was considered sexually provocative, and therefore responsible for attracting various acts of abuse and harassment against girls and women.

Commercial video centres were also considered a result of 'modernity', which tended to influence the leisure activities of many young people in the community. The parents complained that these centres operated throughout the day and late into the night, adding that some of the programmes themselves influenced young people to indulge in sexual activity.

With paths that were relatively narrow and poorly lit at night, families who fetched water outside the homestead faced the threat of men and boys waylaying their daughters and harassing them sexually. During interviews, the girls reported that boys often gathered around water points in order to insult or harass them.

Sexual exploitation of the girls was also blamed on men who reportedly used money or packets of potato chips to seduce young girls into having sex with them. In addition, teachers were accused of sexually harassing girls who they suspected of attending pornographic video shows or being sexually active.

Going to the shops at night was also reported to be risky for girls because boys and men loitered on the footpaths until late into the evening, looking for girls and women to harass or rape. The following excerpt from an interview with a 14-year-old girl illustrates a common concern for parents and their daughters in Kibera:
Interviewer: Boys can rape girls?

Girl: **Yes.**

Interviewer: **Do you know about any such cases?**

Girl:	**There was a day when my father sent me to the kiosk. It was at 10 at night… I met there… a girl who liked to go around murmuring with boys. Mmm…but the boys did not like her. They said that today, [we] will teach you a lesson… [They] caught her and raped her and then they threw her there at the dump.**
Interviewer:	**You saw them raping her?**
Girl: Yes.	
Interviewer:	**You saw them?**
Girl:	**Yes, when I was walking to the kiosk.**
Interviewer:	**How many boys were there?**
Girl:	**Two.**
Interviewer:	**There were two?**
Girl: Yes.	
Interviewer:	**And they were raping her where?**
Girl:	**On the… the ground.**
Interviewer:	**Was she screaming?**
Girl:	**No.**
Interviewer:	**Why not?**
Girl:	**She liked that… (Silence)**
Interviewer:	**So even as they were raping her, she was just quiet, and then she went back home. The boys just finished and said what?**
Girl:	**They just said 'you go away now, I have finished with you'.**
Interviewer:	**And that time were you standing nearby?**
Girl:	**No, I was at the shop looking from there.**

Interviewer:	**Were there other people around?**
Girl:	**No, it was only me and the shopkeeper.**
Interviewer:	**And you told the shopkeeper?**
Girl:	**No, the shopkeeper was busy selling.**
Interviewer:	**And the boys were busy raping her?**
Girl:	**Yes, there were two [boys] and there was a corner there.**

Problematising issues of STIs and HIV/AIDS

Both boys and girls claimed to have designed their own strategies for eliminating their chances of contracting HIV/AIDS. Most of them declared abstinence as the only sure way of protecting themselves from the deadly disease. Others said that, while engaging in friendships with the opposite sex, they would exercise self-control, learn more about AIDS, and try to understand how to protect themselves from HIV infection.

A 12-year-old boy who was out of school referred to the divine authority of the Bible and what he considered God's "original" plan for sexual relationships, as he advocated faithfulness to one partner. He advised other boys and girls on how to eliminate their chances of contracting AIDS:

One has to be like traditional people, every boy to stay with one girl or wife just like Adam and Eve.

A 13-year-old girl appealed to parents to stop sending their daughters outside the home at night, in order to protect them from being sexually harassed and thus exposed to HIV/AIDS.

Although the pupils portrayed themselves as relatively well informed about HIV and AIDS, some of the teachers stressed the need for further education about the pandemic in the context of young people's sexuality. One female teacher said that more creative activities should be provided for children at school, at home and in the community to keep them away from "bad company" and reduce peer pressure to experiment with sex. In response to this concern, teachers pointed out that the school administration had resorted to retaining some children during the evening to enable them to do their homework and avoid being idle after school. After the school day, the girls were also encouraged to walk in groups in order to reduce their chances of being assaulted. While these were good intentions attributed to specific teachers who were concerned about the welfare of their pupils, it also seemed incredible that these same teachers were unaware that girls suffered sexual harassment from some of their male colleagues while on the school premises.

Effects of Gender and Sexuality on Education

Gender and sexuality clearly play a key role in the construction of identities of young people within different social sites of the school, family and community. The study findings clearly reveal the existence of unequal and gendered distribution of domestic labour between girls and boys in the home and school settings, which leave the boys with much less work to do. Such unequal treatment of girls and boys often results in constructions of identities in which femininity is juxtaposed with masculinity. Even when the school attempted to allocate duties more equally, the boys often resisted performing those chores that they regarded as 'domestic', forcing the girls to undertake the boys' share of work in addition to their own. Such behaviour undoubtedly reduced the girls' time for studying and affected their school performances – and their chances for equal education and life opportunities.

Sexual maturation was almost unanimously perceived as detrimental to the life of young adolescents, who lack the life skills to enable them to respond to the challenges of growing up in modern day Nairobi. Adolescence was described as a phase during which sexual attraction and dating between young people of the opposite sex fluctuated, thus affecting the concentration and capability of young people at school. Some of the girls also claimed that menstruation made it difficult for them to concentrate in class, due both to physical pain and the anxiety of people discovering that she was on her period. Some girls confessed that they missed school altogether during their periods. They explained that because they could not afford sanitary pads, they often substituted these with pieces of clothes that quickly soaked with blood, resulting in leakages, discomfort and moments of great embarrassment.

It seemed likely that sexual maturity and the experience of sexual desire overwhelmed many young people and steered them invariably towards sexual experimentation. Such endeavours were possible precursors to pregnancy, as well as STIs or HIV. Reports that girls and boys often watched video shows, including those with a pornographic content, raise concern that such shows may promote sexual thoughts and desires for which younger adolescents are not properly prepared. The young people's own concerns about social, sexual and cultural difficulties at school and in the family reveal a great variety of pressing needs in the areas of gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS education.

HIV/AIDS Education

All of the children interviewed in the Nairobi school confirmed that they received AIDS education. This was done in one lesson that they referred to as 'AIDS Awareness' and which was allocated one period each week. Some of the topics covered included the causes of HIV/AIDS, modes of transmission, prevention, and the care of people living with HIV and AIDS.

The boys and girls praised their formal AIDS lessons, saying that they enlightened them on the disease and, most importantly, taught them how to avoid contracting it. Clearly,

however, these lessons focus more on avoiding sexual relationships than on the life skills that enable young people to take charge of their lives in a more responsible way and to have friends of the opposite sex without jeopardising their sexual health. The out-of-school boys and girls said that they lacked any HIV/AIDS education and recommended that it be introduced at the community level to enable them to learn how to protect themselves from HIV infection.

Teachers described AIDS education as "very important" because it imparted vital knowledge and helped to create awareness about the nature and form of the disease. The following are some of the topics that were addressed in the AIDS Awareness lessons in the Kibera school:

- The nature of HIV/AIDS;
- Modes of transmission; Methods of prevention;
- Taking care of people living with HIV and AIDS.

Observing AIDS education lessons

During the AIDS Awareness lessons, the class teachers tried to tie the subject matter of the lessons to other subjects that the pupils had been learning, such as Science, Home Science or Religious Education. However, as the lessons were only allocated one 35-minute session each week, some teachers tended only to cover a few issues, using regular lecture methods and without giving the pupils a chance to discuss the issues or ask questions. Several of the class teachers complained that, considering the devastating impact of AIDS in Kenya, 35 minutes a week was hardly appropriate or adequate.

As was the case in Garissa, most of the Nairobi teachers reported that the AIDS Awareness lessons triggered more participation from boys than girls. One of the teachers reported that some children were unwilling to discuss anything related to sex or sexuality. In such cases, the teachers allowed the pupils to write, anonymously, their questions on paper and forward them to the teacher for discussion. During the lessons, it was clear that boys tended to ask more questions on AIDS than did girls. Some of the questions that the boys asked included:

- What are the symptoms shown by those suffering from HIV/AIDS?
- What will happen when our parents die of AIDS? Will we also die of the disease?
- If I have sex once, can I get AIDS?
- If I get raped, what can I do to make sure I don't get AIDS?

The teachers also noted that, even though many of the pupils did not respond enthusiastically, they seemed to be very attentive during the AIDS Awareness lessons, and several of them asked probing and pertinent questions. Compared with Garissa, however, the pupils seemed relatively comfortable during the AIDS lessons, perhaps because they had seen many people affected and infected by HIV and AIDS in their community.

From the interviews with pupils and the classroom observations, it was evident that most teachers were not very gender sensitive, as they did not create opportunities to work

and compare learning within single-sex and mixed-sex groups. At no time did any of the teachers organise their class into single-sex groups to discuss sensitive topics regarding sexuality or HIV/AIDS. It was thus very difficult to observe how girls and boys constructed themselves in different classroom and learning contexts.

AIDS education: challenges and gaps

There were complaints that a few of the pupils did not take the AIDS Awareness lessons very seriously. This led one of the Standard 7 girls, 14-year-old Jelina, to express her concern that,

> **Other children don't listen when they are being taught. Instead they continue having boyfriends and going to cinemas and can contract HIV/AIDS.**

Despite such complaints, however, most of the boys and girls said they sympathised with people who were suffering from HIV or dying from AIDS.

According to many of the teachers, some children became uncomfortable during the AIDS lessons, making it difficult for the teachers to conduct the lessons effectively. Some of them confessed that they also felt uncomfortable while teaching the subject, as they were anxious that pupils might raise issues that they could not address effectively. The teachers also identified a lack of relevant training and the absence of quality resource materials as major challenges to effective HIV/AIDS education. The teachers denied the accusation that they did not employ the activities recommended in the teaching manual, arguing that they needed more than 35 minutes a week for such activities – in addition to more practical and relevant teaching materials. While none of them complained of specific gaps in the AIDS syllabus, they all pointed to the need to urgently address the serious shortage of teaching capacity for effectively teaching the subject.

AIDS education and behaviour change

Some of the teachers and pupils reported significant levels of behaviour change, which they attributed to their AIDS education. Although these claims could not be verified through any formal records, the researchers relied upon the children's declarations of their own behaviour changes. The female teachers seemed confident that most of the sexually active pupils had stopped having sexual relationships, as a lot of fear had been instilled in them. However, one teacher seemed sceptical about the anticipated behaviour changes, claiming that AIDS education was relatively too new for teachers to have observed any positive behavioural change. Another AIDS education teacher believed that pupils only changed their behaviour for a short while – and then reverted to their original sexual behaviour.

Some teachers explained that, as AIDS education teachers, they tried to relate with the children in a friendlier manner, in order to gain their confidence and trust as they discussed sensitive issues. A female teacher claimed that, during her lesson, she tried as much as possible to relate real life experiences on HIV/AIDS to make the lessons more relevant.

Life Skills for Combating Sexual Attacks on Girls

Children travelling in groups

In both Garissa and Nairobi, walking in groups to and from school was deemed an effective strategy for deterring potential sex attacks. Both teachers and parents confirmed that this was a practical way for girls to reduce their vulnerability to attacks by men and boys.

Girls escorting each other

In the same way, girls also tended to travel in pairs while running errands for their parents. In this case, however, the girls said they would depend upon their companion to seek help for them in the case of an attack.

Boys escorting girls

Girls in Nairobi also reported cases in which boys escorted them to protect them from harassment by other boys. The escorts were usually said to be relatives, friends or boyfriends. It is also important to point out that, while this is an important life skill, studies have also shown that girls tended to be sexually harassed by relatives or people with whom they were acquainted and who they trusted. As such, this life skill also has potential risks for girls.

Screaming to attract attention

Screaming or yelling while in danger or when being harassed was a handy life skill that had been used by some of the girls in Nairobi. In this context, screaming acted as a distress call as well as an indication of lack of consensual agreement. Girls and teachers described this strategy as a vital life skill requiring attention in future AIDS and life skills education.

Reporting harassment to family and other adults

Since the essence of life skills is to help people stand up for themselves and seek redress for offences committed against them, reporting incidences of sexual harassment or attacks to trusted adults created an important opportunity for remedial action, such as medical care and psychological support. This also helped to break the 'conspiracy of silence' that so often surrounds girls' harassment, by empowering them to report all cases of harassment, irrespective of the perpetrators' status. As a life skill strategy, girls said that they only resorted to reporting when they were certain that their teachers, parents or guardians would be responsive. Without equivocation, the Nairobi girls declared their lack of trust in their male teachers, saying that under no circumstances would they report sexual harassment to any of them. They argued that the male teachers were themselves responsible for harassing many female pupils, and that these pupils did not know who to turn to for redress. Clearly, the girls were sending out a plea to be rescued from their own teachers, who were supposed to be their point of refuge.

In view of all these points, the following two chapters present a short synopsis of the study findings, together with a list of recommendations that can be devised from them.

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Part Four: Discussion of Study Findings

This study raises pertinent issues that clearly demonstrate that gender and sexuality play vital roles in differentiating the education experiences of boys and girls in modern day Kenya. In addition, these different experiences expose both boys and girls to various risky situations and vulnerabilities, including the contracting of STIs and HIV/AIDS.

The gender-related vulnerability of boys and girls to STIs and HIV/AIDS is constructed by and operates within a set of roles and norms that often differ between tribe, religion and area. Gender norms often determine what girls and boys are supposed to know about sex and sexuality, and limit their ability to accurately determine their level of risk and to acquire the information and means to protect themselves. In both our study districts – as in most places – the feminine ideal is characterised by passivity, ignorance, and the expectation that women will defer to men's sexual needs. This subordinate position coupled with lack of autonomy makes negotiation in sexual relationships extremely difficult.

The study also found that masculinity was usually defined by sexual prowess and control over sexual relationships and interactions. Access to and control over resources is profoundly influenced by gender in Kenya (Population Council, 2000). In both the private and public domains, economic dependence and independence shape relationships as they often determine where power is located.

How we understand boys' and girls' vulnerability to STIs and HIV/AIDS thus requires a deeper knowledge of the complex arena of gender roles, expectations, rights and responsibilities (as does our understanding of the issues surrounding girls' education). The findings of this study confirm the reality that the role of women in Kenya is subordinate to that of men in virtually every sphere of life.

Girls are 'socialised' to be quiet and submissive and to be primarily good wives and mothers (Dixon-Mueller, 1993). Not surprisingly, girls come to believe that their status and treatment are justified, thus making it more difficult to break through patriarchal norms and sexual values. In such circumstances, girls become particularly vulnerable to exploitation and gender based violence, to sexual harassment, abuse, rape and female genital mutilation.

In this study, most of the girls, especially in Nairobi, expressed disaffection with what they perceived as the unfair sexual division of labour. In their homes, they pointed out that boys were not allocated as much work as girls. The boys, however, perceived the jobs allocated to girls as dirty and more demeaning than those allocated to boys. Boys perceived their roles as conferring on them a higher status than that of girls. For example, most parents appeared to allocate most domestic chores to girls rather than boys, thus perpetuating gender inequality within the family. Such work allocation could be interpreted as 'policing' cultural gender lines and ensuring that girls internalised the parents' prescribed image of femininity. This was further evidenced by the fact that most respondents indicated that fathers and boys rarely participated in domestic chores. Overall, girls appeared, to a certain extent, to be more liberal in their gender attitudes than boys in both study districts.

In both districts, boys and girls reported good school performances as a source of pride and happiness, as well as receiving presents and helping other people. On the other hand, they reported sadness when a relative died or when they failed exams. In both districts, children aspired to become like successful personalities in their communities, often based upon gender-typical careers for men and women. The boys seemed to be impressed by the courageousness of their role models – a very masculine attribute. Common aspirations for both boys and girls included doctors, teachers, pilots and politicians. Boys wanted to become carpenters, scientists, artists and pastors, while girls aspired to be judges, nurses, nuns, secretaries and models. The study also found that boys and girls related differently to the researchers, teachers and parents – relating better and confiding more with adults of their own gender.

Modernity and tradition influenced the way that children and parents identified themselves in both study districts. The modern way of life was often associated with 'risky' situations, with 'modern' dressing and lifestyles blamed for exposing children to STIs and HIV/AIDS. It was clear that increasing economic pressures and greater permissiveness have resulted in a growing number of girls having sex in exchange for money, school fees or gifts. The low status of girls and their lack of personal power only exacerbates this problem.

Findings from Nairobi provide a clear indication that modernisation and the infiltration of foreign cultures have played a major role in disrupting family life, leading to a breakdown of social controls and personal inhibitions. In learning the new, the old has been challenged, modified, and often discarded. In both the study districts, especially Nairobi, young boys and girls regarded themselves as modern rather than traditional and, in the process of trying to cope with modernity, were becoming more sexually active, using drugs and alcohol, dropping out of school, and displaying deviant behaviour. The findings from Nairobi indicate that, with modernisation, roles, norms and values governing sexuality have been disrupted. More and more boys and girls are entering into sexual activity at a very early age, resulting in more cases of teenage pregnancies – and teenage HIV infection.

Despite this growing permissiveness, relationships between boys and girls remain culturally unacceptable in much of modern Kenya. The study findings show that boys and girls related well with adults both in and out of school, but within culturally acceptable boundaries. Single gender sexes related very well in both districts, with girls saying they shared their problems, played together, and assisted each other in different capacities. Mixed gender relationships were not common and were actively discouraged, especially in Garissa. Both boys and girls were elusive in discussing their relationships with the opposite sex, although they were often quick to 'accuse' others. The findings suggest that relationships between the sexes do exist, especially in Nairobi, but only in a discrete manner. The concept of shame in Garissa strongly influenced how individuals perceived themselves and how they related to each other. Girls were expected to dress in the culturally prescribed dress code, which minimised their exposure to boys and men. Sitting arrangements in class also ensured that boys were separated from girls.

Peer pressure was seen to exert a strong influence on boys' and girls' relationships, both positively and negatively. Friends and schoolmates influenced the type of associations the children had, how they identified themselves, and the risky situations they exposed themselves to. Teachers and parents reported observing a lot of peer pressure, and it appeared to be important to most children to receive the approval of their peers.

In both districts, male and female teachers related well with the pupils, although more with those of the same gender. Even though teachers provided guidance and counselling to their pupils, it was mainly on academic matters. In Nairobi, there were reported incidences of the sexual harassment of girls by male teachers, peers and parents. In Garissa, while there were no reported cases of sexual harassment, rape cases had been reported within the community. Furthermore, some of the Nairobi girls claimed that fathers and male relatives took advantage of them and sexually harassed them. Studies on sexual harassment have shown that this form of harassment is a major factor generating apathy in girls' education (Dixon-Mueller, 1993). Some of the girls interviewed in Nairobi complained that sexual harassment by teachers and boys at school interfered with their learning and was detrimental to their general education. According to these girls, both male and female teachers labelled them, while boys tried to touch their breasts and buttocks, which upset and traumatised them.

This study confirms suggestions that Kenyan boys and girls are sexually active from an early age (Chege and Okumu, 1993; IPPF, 1994; KDHS, 1998). This in itself is a reflection of a major breakdown in social organisation, social controls at both family and community level, and norms governing the behaviour of children and sexual behaviour in general. As well as exposing children to dangerous situations, it also makes them much more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. Modern families seem, in many cases, to have lost their ability to provide advice on – and incentives to achieve – what is desirable and worthwhile. Families in Garissa, because of their strong cultural ties, ensured that certain values and norms were translated into action – although this clearly had a detrimental effect on girls' education. In Nairobi, on the other hand, the 'modern society' in which the participants lived offered no norms or traditions to regulate children's behaviour or protect them from risky situations. In addition, there were few common standards to reduce the children's chances of being drawn into the worlds of drug abuse and commercial sex.

Despite an increasingly liberal mass media, issues of sexuality and gender based interpersonal power are still not dealt with openly. Shrouded in silence and secrecy, distorted and sensationalised in movies and magazines, the topic of sexuality often elicits feelings of shame and embarrassment. The realistic treatment of sexuality and power can be threatening because it brings to the surface fundamental aspects of people's innermost selves and thus exposes their vulnerabilities. Furthermore, the implicit (as opposed to explicit) messages that children are given about their sexuality are often negative, distorted by myths, and therefore harmful. When adolescent sexuality becomes undesirable, parents typically resort to vague threats or warnings such as, "Stay away from boys!" Those who recognise their children's need for accurate information often lack such knowledge – and thus the cycle of ignorance and embarrassment continues (Ilinigumugabo, 1995).

This study confirmed that young boys and girls in Kenya have inadequate information on their own sexuality (Chege and Okumu, 1993). They are ignorant of what to do in the event of difficulties arising from the onset of sexual desire, and of how to protect themselves against certain risks and vulnerable situations that might interfere with their learning process. Furthermore, many of the problems young boys and girls face in dealing with sexuality issues emanate from inadequate parental guidance and lack of appropriate information at various stages of growing up. Our findings indicate that parents, teachers and community leaders are not adequately guiding their children towards responsible adulthood. Parents, especially those interviewed in Nairobi, appeared to be experiencing the negative effects of social and economic upheavals such that they hardly have any spare time to counsel or guide their children. This leads to family breakdown, immoral behaviour – and further economic hardship.

As information is scarce, few programmes provide children with the practical information and skills that they need for understanding and managing their sexuality. Yet, despite a

clear lack of information on STIs and HIV/AIDS in both districts, children in and out of school were sexually active, particularly in Nairobi. In Garissa, where the children did not want to discuss sexuality at all due to their cultural confinements, the traditional means of acquiring information on such issues seems to have broken down – although it has not been replaced by any alternative means of acquiring information. In both study districts, however, it seemed that parents hardly discussed sex and sexuality matters with their children, leaving them to seek often flawed information from their peers. The girls often found out about menstruation only after discovering with horror that they were bleeding. The few sexuality discussions reported were between mothers and daughters, in which mothers mainly cautioned their daughters not to get pregnant.

Fear of pregnancy often outweighed other concerns – including contracting HIV/AIDS – among the young people interviewed. Most of the parents in both districts appeared to be more concerned with their girls becoming pregnant than contracting sexually transmitted infections. Therefore, the focus on sexuality for girls was usually to ensure that pregnancy never occurred until marriage. In Garissa, for example, pregnancy was portrayed as the worst thing that could happen to a girl – the ultimate 'shame'. This fear often made parents withdraw their girls from school as they approached puberty. This probably explains why there were only three girls in Standard 8 and one girl in Standard 7. Other fears mentioned included rape, sexual harassment, drug use and stealing.

The low rates of girls' access, enrolment and retention in Garissa were attributed to cultural attitudes that place little value on girls' education, levels of poverty, gender insensitive practices, and the fear of parents over girls' security at school. Traditional practices such as early marriage also had a negative impact on girls' education. The incidence of early marriage among children who dropped out of school in Nairobi was relatively lower than in Garissa.

Most of the children interviewed in both study sites had heard of HIV/AIDS, and identified sexual transmission as the main mode of transmission. Other modes identified included contaminated blood and the use of un-sterilised instruments. Some participants also mentioned mother-to-child transmission. Comparing the two study districts, the level of AIDS awareness appeared to be higher in Nairobi.

Most of the respondents, especially school pupils, noted that their main source of information on HIV/AIDS was AIDS Awareness lessons at school. In Garissa, however, AIDS education was taught irregularly. Teachers in both districts indicated that they had not been trained in the subject, which served to limit their AIDS education teaching. In Garissa, teachers also reported the lack of a syllabus and adequate resources to enable them to teach the subject effectively. As a result, their AIDS education was integrated with other subjects such as science and Islamic religious education. Other sources of information on HIV/AIDS were resource persons who gave talks and lectures in the schools, particularly in Nairobi. Very few parents gave their children direct information

on STIs or HIV/AIDS. Children out of school did not have any formalised way of receiving information on the subject. Overall, levels of access to information on STIs, HIV and AIDS were found to be relatively low, especially in Garissa.

In both districts, certain lifestyle practices associated with modernity and tradition were blamed for encouraging the spread of STIs and HIV/AIDS. For example, in Nairobi, 'modern' forms of dressing involving short, tight or transparent clothes were considered a provocative statement by girls and women, which could lead to cases of sexual abuse and harassment. Watching 'inappropriate' television and video programmes was also blamed for negatively influencing the behaviour of boys and girls – particularly the pornographic movies and magazines that were said to be freely accessible in Kibera. Parents and community leaders blamed such 'modern' influences for boosting incidences of premarital sex among young people.

The persistent practice of female genital mutilation also clearly poses a serious risk to the sexual health of young girls, particularly in Garissa. The study findings show that the exponents of female circumcision – including parents and prominent community leaders – continue to blatantly ignore scientific evidence that shows how poorly sterilised instruments and unhygienic practices contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

In both sites, there were popular rumours, myths and misconceptions regarding the spread of HIV/AIDS. Some children, particularly in Garissa, did not have accurate and appropriate information on the disease or its transmission. It was clear, however, that girls were particularly vulnerable – both from their lack of knowledge and their disempowered gendered positions.

Although most of the study respondents agreed that the vulnerability of young people could be reduced by ensuring better discipline within and outside school, it is clear that the schools alone cannot stem the tide of vulnerability. In this high-risk era, it is imperative that parents take a greater responsibility in discussing matters of sexuality with their children – and in intensifying activities to encourage behaviour change for both in and out-of-school children.

While AIDS education has been introduced in schools, it continues to receive minimal attention from those responsible for executing it. This study raises pressing issues and concerns regarding the implementation of formal AIDS education. In particular, it calls for the urgent building of teaching capacity to provide more practical, better quality AIDS education in all Kenyan schools.

Some of the challenges that need to be addressed include personnel skills and resource materials for providing a stronger, more effective AIDS curriculum. Our observations found that, in several instances, teachers were unable to answer key questions posed by their pupils. Inadequately trained teachers who are uncomfortable in dealing with certain topics may actually exclude these topics, or give pupils incorrect information. Making

resource and reference materials available to both teachers and pupils is also considered essential to the provision of comprehensive AIDS education.

Systematic life skills education was also found to be lacking at virtually all levels. The study findings indicate that most children acquire their own life skills for use in risky situations. These skills include shouting for help, girls walking together, and reporting any form of attack or harassment. However, the researchers note that, given the diversity of risky situations that modern Kenyan children are exposed to, life skills education should focus on equipping them with more practical skills specifically tailored to their situations.

It is evident from the study findings that Kenyan boys and girls face a number of common challenges in their development. These challenges are reflected in the increasing number of children who are becoming sexually active at early ages, teenage pregnancies, school dropouts, drug users, and a growing incidence of STIs and HIV/AIDS. Boys and girls clearly require appropriate skills that can help them to manage the risky situations to which they are exposed. These include communication and negotiation skills, value analysis, decision-making skills, and the ability to resist peer pressure.

Such life skills should also enhance appropriate values and attitudes towards growing up, gender roles, risk taking, sexual expression, and friendship. Such skills – if practically and sensitively provided – will also help to mitigate and reduce the risks associated with STIs and HIV/AIDS. Behaviour change communication must be part of all life skills taught in Kenya, as such change is clearly crucial to reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

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Part Five: Recommendations

The recommendations in this chapter are designed to address the specific objectives of the study, while providing a platform for the provision of practical and appropriate HIV/AIDS and life skills education for the children of Kenya. The recommendations have been drawn up in the context of the different social constructions of gender and sexuality identified in the study, and an analysis of how these constructions can usefully be incorporated into the development of relevant HIV/AIDS and life skills education.

1. Strengthening Sexuality, AIDS Education and Life Skills in Schools

- Schools should make every effort to create an environment that is supportive of children's social and physical development, considering the diverse and difficult challenges that they face. This must include the provision of accurate, relevant information on all aspects of human sexuality. Children should also be assisted to consciously explore, question, affirm and develop their own feelings, attitudes and values on the various dimensions of gender and sexuality.
- Teachers should strive to enhance their pupils' self-esteem and social skills for developing mutually satisfying, supportive and equitable relationships, including the expression of one's gender. This

will enable boys and girls to act responsibly in the expression of their sexuality and in their social relationships.

- All teachers should be trained and regularly 'in-serviced' on life skills education. They should also be provided with and sensitised on the AIDS education syllabus and other existing life skills materials.
- Sensitive topics should be handled by teachers whom both the boys and the girls trust and can easily confide in and relate to. It is suggested that, during such lessons, boys and girls should sometimes be segregated by gender. In view of to enormous challenges they face, boys and girls have their own gender-specific concerns that require different information and approaches to learning.

2. Increasing the Knowledge Base of Sexuality, STIs and HIV/AIDS

- Parents and other influential members of the community should be encouraged, through education and sensitisation, to discuss sexuality matters with their children. Parents should be equipped with communication skills to enable them to discuss such issues freely, honestly and without any inhibitions.
- Widespread community education and awareness should be initiated to address and redress the many misconceptions regarding HIV/AIDS. Such strategies, including multi-media Information, Education and Communication (IEC) initiatives, should be geared towards promoting positive behaviour change.
- Local video centres, where children can watch pornographic material, should be provided with AIDS awareness, promotion and 'edutainment' programmes, as a way of constructively diversifying their 'menu' while maintaining their attention and interest.
- Mechanisms should be put in place to engage idle or out-of-school children in constructive and educational activities, such as games, creative arts, youth groups and apprenticeships.

3. Increasing and Strengthening Peer Education in Schools

- As an important and proven method for supporting boys and girls of the same age to educate their peers, more peer group leaders should be identified and provided with the skills to facilitate life skills and HIV/AIDS education in school. Teachers must support peer leaders as a vital means of complementing their lessons and reinforcing the communication of life skills information to their respective peer groups.

4. Strengthening Guidance and Counselling

- Guidance and Counselling in schools should be reorganised and strengthened – and always taught by a trained and qualified counsellor. Each school should be encouraged to employ a trained counsellor, who is empathetic towards young

people's needs and concerns, open to ideas, and able to maintain confidentiality. While Guidance and Counselling is currently taught by different teachers, who are chosen according to subject and may have little interest or talent, it is recommended that, in cases where AIDS lessons are taught independently, teachers should volunteer themselves for the role.

- It is further recommended that the Ministry of Education seek the services of external counsellors, who can visit schools to give guidance and counselling on sexuality matters to individuals or groups of children. This will ensure that children have someone to confide in besides their teachers, who they may not always trust.
- Spiritual guidance should also be provided within school as a way of building the moral integrity of children.
- In addition, it may be useful to change the name of 'Guidance and Counselling' to a title that reflects a greater degree of child-centred interaction and learning, rather than a subject focused on discipline and problem solving.

5. Addressing Risky Situations

- In view of the many risky situations highlighted in this study, there is a clear need to design more gender sensitive and culturally appropriate life skills materials to help boys and girls develop their capacity for handling situations responsibly. These life skills should also focus on enhancing appropriate values and attitudes towards growing up, gender roles, risk taking, sexual expression, and friendship between boys and girls.
- The Ministry of Education should take urgent steps to address all reported cases of sexual harassment of pupils by teachers. This is imperative as such harassment has a detrimental impact on a child's performance at school – if not their performance in life.

6. Increasing Girls' Participation

In order to mitigate the dropout rate of girls and increase their access, retention and completion of schooling, the following interventions are recommended:

- Parents should be sensitised on the need for girls to attend school. In needy cases, the relevant authorities should waive fees and other school requirements.
- Schools should take initiatives to raise funds to meet girls' educational requirements. Government bursaries should be channelled towards the levels of schooling at which girls will benefit. Community leaders should also initiate bursary funds to assist needy children within the community.
- Schools should make provisions to cater for the special needs of girls during

their monthly periods, and provide them with advice and, wherever possible, sanitary pads.

- Schools and communities should highlight the risks and advocate against early marriages for young girls. They should also serve as 'safe havens' for girls who are at risk of early marriage.
- 'Safe Centres' for young people should be established within the community, where they can receive assistance in times of distress, resource materials, shelter, and legal or professional advice in the process of seeking redress.
- School materials such as stationery and books should be made available to pupils to reduce drop out and truancy. This will discourage children, especially girls, from being lured into sex by men or women who may buy them such materials.

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