An interpretive inquiry into girls’ educational choices and aspirations: A case study of Murang’a district, Kenya

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me

Philippians 4:13 (KJV)
ABSTRACT

Global consensus on the importance of gender equity in education is perhaps one of the greatest agreements reached in the twentieth century. However, for countries in the sub Saharan African region where disparities of gender are wide and primary education takes priority, secondary education continues to remain in the periphery. As countries make progress towards the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE), the concerns for gender equity and equality have become associated with school access and pupil retention. Yet, patterns and trends in school enrollment suggest that disparities of gender are more complex. As lessons are learned from the achievements and challenges of attaining UPE, it is increasingly apparent that gender disparities within education occur in, within and beyond access to schooling. In other words, the challenge of making education gender equal goes beyond school access and school enrollment.

Kenya is a signatory to the 1990 Jomtein Declaration on Education For All (EFA). It is also among the few countries in the sub Saharan Africa region with a significantly reduced gender gap in primary and secondary education. This is in tandem with the third of the eight Millennium Development Goals whose aims bear a broad social and economic development agenda. While education equity is important in Kenya and tremendous progress has been made in primary education, beyond the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) there is an even more significant target; gender equity in education both in primary and secondary education by 2015. The attainment of this target requires more than access to schooling and for this reason it poses great challenges to governments and schools.

In light of the progress made in Kenya and the need for more equitable education beyond primary education, this study conceives a need for an incisive examination of education equity priority areas in Kenya. The study argues on the need for a shift of concern and debate from primary education to secondary education because the gains of UPE only become meaningful when education equity is secured in secondary education. The study underscores that beyond school access and retention, education output and outcomes need to become prominent variables because they gauge trends and patterns and the quality of gains made where education is claimed to be both accessible and equitable.
Using case study method, the study makes a critical interpretation of the schooling experiences, educational choices, preferences and aspirations of girls taking secondary education in single-sex schools in Murang’a district, Kenya.

The study shows that girls schooling experiences are not homogenous and that there are contradictions in the ways that girls experience their schooling and make educational choices. It also shows that girls do not necessarily stand good chances with their education simply because they are enrolled in single-sex schools. The study reveals individual subjectivities and schooling culture to be at the centre of the differences between schools and the schooling experiences that girls have. The two have impact on how girls perceive themselves and their abilities, the preferences they nurture and the educational choices they make. The study draws attention to nuances in access and equity within girls’ education. It draws out issues and nuances linked to gender access, equity and equality with respect to school, teacher and subject access.

Though the study is not generaliseable, it shows that in contexts where female access and survival is secured, there is need for attention to be paid to the environments that nurture educational choices and preferences so that the high rates in school access become translated into equally high educational output and outcomes.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPE</td>
<td>Certificate of Primary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE</td>
<td>Christian Religious Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EACE</td>
<td>East African Certificate of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAACE</td>
<td>East African Advanced Certificate of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
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<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender And Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communication Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>KACE</td>
<td>Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education</td>
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<td>KANU</td>
<td>Kenya African National Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCE</td>
<td>Kenya Certificate of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCPE</td>
<td>Kenya Certificate of Primary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCSE</td>
<td>Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>KJSE</td>
<td>Kenya Junior Secondary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNEC</td>
<td>Kenya National Examination Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ksh</td>
<td>Kenya shilling</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoES&amp;T</td>
<td>Ministry of Education Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARC</td>
<td>National Alliance Rainbow Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RoK</td>
<td>Republic of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEE</td>
<td>Social Education and Ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPE</td>
<td>Universal Primary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAD</td>
<td>Women and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WED</td>
<td>Women and Environmental Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WID</td>
<td>Women in Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-4-2-3</td>
<td>7 years primary, 4 years secondary, 2 years senior secondary, 3 university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-4-4</td>
<td>8 years primary, 4 years secondary, 4 university</td>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is an established fact that strong correlation exists between socio-economic development and education. For many countries in sub-Saharan Africa where socio-economic development is slow in growth, education has been identified as a stimulus to growth and the participation of women in education an integral component to this achievement. The World Economic Forum on women’s development states the following about this correlation (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005:5):

Educational attainment is, without doubt, the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society, for without education of comparable quality and content to that given to boys and men, and relevant to existing knowledge and real needs, women are unable to access well-paid, formal sector jobs, advance within them, participate in and be represented in government and gain political influence. Moreover, the risk increases for society as a whole that the next generation of children will similarly be ill-prepared.

Women play a crucial role in social and economic development and the majority of women in sub Saharan Africa, the quality of participation in the national economy, access to economic opportunities, political empowerment, health and well being are all linked to education; the years of schooling as well as the quality of education itself. For the majority of women in Kenya, contribution to social and economic development is made with the benefit of only a primary school education and in some regions of the country with no education at all (UNESCO, 2002; 2003; 2004). For Kenya, a country where education is given priority status and commands high budgetary investment, the quality of education accessible to females is disconcerting. Statistical trends show that female access to education is easier but such access is dominantly in primary education. Females constitute a slightly higher majority of the Kenyan population and while they are able to access primary education easily because it is free, some lose out on quality education because of limited resources and even more on access to post primary education because of cost and limited places. With the global focus being on primary education and attainment of Universal Primary Education (EFA), there is little that is researched on post primary education in Kenya particularly secondary education.
This study is undertaken in the attempt to thrust secondary and tertiary education into the limelight of educational debates by way of research into girls schooling experiences. The study envisages a need to shift the focus of education research in Kenya from primary education to secondary education. This is because the secondary education is largely under researched, yet it is a crucial level of education in that it is the foundation of employment, higher education and skills development for industrialisation. It is also a level of education that more women must participate in and build on if the goals and ideals of Kenya’s industrialisation are to be realised.

The most recent population census statistics show that Kenyan women have largely remained marginalised and disempowered (Kenya, Republic of; hereafter referred to as RoK, 2001a; 2001b). They bear the brunt of poverty including extremities of social injustice like human rights abuse, conflict and displacement, and are underrepresented and discriminated against in the labour market and in leadership and governance. Quality leadership and governance steers thriving political economy and it is in such sectors where the engagement of women is critical for socio-economic development to grow and be sustained.

In terms of social and economic development, Kenya is among the more progressive countries in sub-Saharan Africa. As already mentioned the country invests highly in education. Since the introduction of free primary education is 2002, there has been marked improvement in female access to schooling. However, female access and representation at the post-primary level of education remains skewed. National secondary education statistics show a closing gender gap but a more critical analysis of the gender patterns reveals regional disparities. Most notable are the low transition patterns between primary and secondary school; secondary school and tertiary education (UNESCO, 2002; 2004). In fact, secondary and tertiary education is characterised largely by low female representation, low participation and underachievement in key school subjects, degree courses and waged employment, particularly those linked to maths, science and technology.

A woman plays a pivotal role in development and since gender is known to adversely affect girls in their education, the provision of education opportunities that are equal and of high quality remains to female educational advancement. While the introduction of free primary education has helped reduce opportunity costs to education thereby enabling more girls to receive primary education, the case is not the same in secondary education. Levies are still
charged in secondary education. This is a cost that determines secondary school access especially with respect to single-sex boarding schools. Within public education there is preference for single-sex education because it is believed to offer value for money. There is consensus in the literature on single-sex education within public sector education that lays claim to improved female access to gender equal quality education (Lee and Lockheed, 1990; Leach and Machakanja, 2000; Morrell, 2000; Hubbard and Datnow, 2002).

This study is persuaded by these arguments and the fact that the establishment of single-sex schools is highly encouraged in Kenya, more so in rural areas where gender related inequalities adversely affect girls in their education.

Most literature on girls’ education also lays claim to the advantages of single-sex schooling for girls (see 3.5). In sub-Saharan African countries, arguments have been put forward that single-sex schools mitigate the social and cultural factors known to hinder effective educational participation among girls (see Swainson, 1995). Besides helping to fast track the 1990 Jomtein Declaration on Education for All to attain gender equality in secondary education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000a; 2003), single-sex schools are associated with high academic achievement and the study of science and technology subjects among girls. Taken that single-sex schools bear this mandate then education equity needs to be perceived as more than just gender balanced school enrolment figures.

Education equity pivots around the sameness of chances or equalness of educational opportunities for boys and girls. Single-sex schools are assumed to level the playing ground, making it easier for education equity to be realised. This study considers it important to examine what educational opportunities are like for girls and how they come in the context of single-sex schooling taking that the basis of education equity is gender equality. Single-sex schools are assumed to offer girls education that is gender equal but still, gender equity outside of numbers is complex because equity has qualitative forms whose nuances are not easily quantifiable.

For the purposes of in-depth understanding of what educational opportunities exist for girls, how educational choices are made, and the school environments within which these decisions are made, the study examines schooling experiences and educational choices among girls.
enrolled in their third (FIII) and fourth year (FIV) of secondary school. These are senior grades within secondary education in Kenya.

As the study solely focuses on girls’ schools and girls educational experiences, it uses feminism theories as a framework and lenses (see 3.3 and 3.4) for the examination of issues related to education and gender equity with regard to schooling experiences, school subject preferences and choices, career and higher education aspirations among girls attending rural secondary schools in Murang’a district, Kenya.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Many of the more overt causes of gender disparities in education are now known. However, UNESCO’s annual monitoring and evaluation of gender trends and patterns in education shows that within the sub-Saharan African region, girls still access education with greater difficulty than boys and at all levels of education (UNDP, 2003; UNESCO, 2003). In Kenya, the pattern is no different. Gender disparities have become less visible because of increased school enrolment. But there are still disparities of gender that occur because of the interplay of social, economic and political factors on education. It is on account of such invisibility that the examination of schooling experiences and educational choices among girls requires more refined tools than mere boy/girl comparison. The parameters or indicators used to demonstrate universal primary education illustrate this point.

Universal primary education is a global priority that is yet to be realised in all countries in sub-Saharan Africa. A recent report, which integrates education and the millennium development goals (MDGs), describes the attainment of female enrolment in primary schools as ‘met’ (UN, 2004) but there are intranational imbalances among the countries in the region. Within individual countries, these imbalances are replicated at regional levels and even among individual communities and individual schools.

Nationally, secondary school enrolment statistics in Kenya portray near gender parity. However, regional figures, which carry the weight of the ‘reality on the ground’, show the contrary. Gender parity in secondary education has only been achieved in two of the eight provinces in the country, namely Central and Eastern Province (UNESCO, 2004).
It is for this reason as already pointed out that there is need for a more critical analysis of such figures. School enrolment statistics are based on who attends school yet beyond such figures, there are more substantive equity issues that need to be brought under scrutiny. Thus, when deliberating gender equality in education and more specifically girls’ education, it becomes important to ask the following question: Does the attainment of gender parity facilitate girls’ access to equal education opportunities?

The analysis of girls’ education choices in three different schools points to that fact that even though access and survival is secured, high quality education output and outcomes\(^1\) are not guaranteed (see Chapter 5, 6, 7 and 8 for details). Gender parity does not lead to education equity in education. Why this is so and how it comes to be are questions pursued in this study.

### 1.3 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Research on economic development is conclusive that the more the years of schooling the higher the private and social returns are on education for women (see 3.3.4 for details). In other words, the level of education achieved by woman has a direct link to decision-making, the quality of choices, autonomy and productivity. It means that, the ease with which females’ access more years of schooling, particularly in sub-Saharan African countries, can make a difference to the contribution that a woman makes within private and public arenas. This is an important factor considered in this study because of the implications on education policies and the legal protections that ease access to and retention in school for girls.

In Kenya, secondary and tertiary level education is characterised by a steep decline in enrolment and low female participation in science and technology related courses and careers (UNESCO, 2004; RoK, 1999; RoK, 2000a).

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\(^1\)Education output and education outcome are one among four dimensions of education equality outlined by Schiefelbein and Farrell (1980) some of the earliest researchers on gender equity in education in the Third World. While school access is a basic indicator of the achievement of gender equality a gender balance in all four is the ultimate indication of gender equality in education:

- **Access** (enrolment in school, also known as participation)
- **Survival** (completing a given education cycle)
- **Output** (levels of learning by gender)
- **Outcome** (job status or income level)
Morrell (2000) identifies four key areas that are important to the schooling of girls. These are academic performance and subject choice; ethos of the school, sexual harassment and role models, self esteem and post school achievement. All four areas according to Morrell (2000) are catered for in single-sex schools. The preference for these schools is also linked to social and security reasons. In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya violent conditions, vulnerability to sexual abuse, early marriage have re-opened debate on the role of single-sex education in securing safety for girls (Leach, Machakanja, 2000; Morrell, 2000) as the schools have become a practical intervention to resolve problems linked to gender. In Kenya, single-sex schools are a popular option at the secondary level for the reasons cited above and also for their association with high survival rates and high academic achievement (Lee and Lockheed, 1990). These schools provide an alternative to co-education for groups that are vulnerable and marginalised as is the case with girls in Kenya.

The single-sex school is an intervention within a gendered education system that is growing in popularity in Kenya (Mensch and Lloyd, 1998). This is because of the quality education associated with single-sex schooling. An example is the study of subjects and courses known to be dominated by males. The study of science and technology related subjects is common in single-sex girls’ schools and colleges in the United States (Tidball, Tidball and Wolf-Wendel, 1999; Tidball, 1980). A few studies in Africa have made similar links with mathematics e.g. Eshiwani (1982) in Kenya and Ifelunni (1997) in Nigeria. The provisions of such schooling enable girls to launch into non traditional careers, again in science and technology (see Erinosho, 1997). Since quality education output and outcomes are linked to single-sex schools, the question to ask of such schools is how they promote education equity. Schooling experiences, school subject preferences and choices, career and higher aspirations are less salient features of interrogation within schooling and education in Kenya. Yet, they are intersected by gendered notions and experiences either overtly or covertly.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study explores school subject preferences, higher education and career aspirations with the aim of understanding how girls’ experiences, in and out of school, shape their choice of

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2 From the inception of the 8-4-4 system of education, only two out of the eleven girls’ schools in Murang’a district have been rated among the top hundred schools in the national Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examination. But even then, the ‘C’ mean score is comparatively low in terms of the qualifying points for admission to public universities. Even with the favour of affirmative action mandate for female applicants, girls’ schools in the district achievement is low in science and maths and few of them are admitted to public universities.
school and subjects; preferences and aspirations with respect to future careers. Four questions guide this principal research objective:

- How do girls experience schooling in an all girls school environment?
- What are girls’ preferences with regard to school subjects?
- What are girls’ aspirations for higher education?
- What are girls’ career aspirations?

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is lodged in the interpretive paradigm. It uses a multiple case study approach and combines qualitative and quantitative data gathering and data analysis methods (see Chapter 4 for a comprehensive discussion on the methodology). It borrows, conceptually, from liberal, social and radical feminisms and therefore has a leaning towards the critical interpretive.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

I have worked for thirteen years as a high school teacher in various secondary schools in Kenya. In my shift from co-education to single-sex girls’ schools, where I spent most of these years, I began to question education outcomes among rural girls. I wondered why they were different despite the investment made on their education. With the release of the national examination results in February of each year, reports would reach us on the post school status of girls who had completed their secondary education. In many instances it would be reported that girls had got married long before the release of the examination. In other cases, the report would be that girls had no immediate plans about the future much less for higher education. In a few notable cases, there would be reports of girls in employment; others had plans to study abroad, mainly in the United States.

Having gone through a single-sex education myself, I readily agree that it enables girls to complete secondary education with minimal distractions. However, as I reflect on my own schooling and later experiences as a teacher, I ponder why the key motivating reason for the creation of these popular establishments is school retention when so much more could be done to improve the quality of education output and eventual outcomes for girls. Because of their social organisation single-sex schools can almost guarantee survival. For this reason, single-sex girls’ schools should bear the responsibility of empowering girls. A single-sex education ought to lead to recognisable social and economic outcomes that contribute to the
well-being of women in both private and public arenas. This is a view that concurs with Stromquist (1989:144). She argues that “educational access without completion, completion without learning and learning without social recognition does little to ensure improved conditions for women in society”. It is a feminist view that concedes that there is more to the education for and of women than just school enrolment.

Gender is a social issue within education but few studies have been undertaken in Kenya using feminism theories as an analytic lens for exploring, examining, questioning and interrogating education equity and equality. It matters that there is gender equality in school access and survival and in education output and outcomes. This is social equity from a feminist perspective. Access, survival, output and outcomes are four levels said to be critical indicators of education equity (see Schiefelbein and Farrell, 1980). These four levels form the premise of this study which endeavours to contribute to the knowledge base that is shifting research and debate on gender and education from matters of formal equality to substantive equality (see Subrahmanian, 2003). The study contributes to a better understanding of the complex factors that perpetuate gendering in education contexts where formal equality has been secured and adds to the ongoing debates that are taking girls education beyond matters of access (see Heward and Bunwaree, 1999; Unterhalter, 2005).

The study also has practical relevance as it documents schooling realities and provides education practitioners with insights into how educational values and beliefs are constructed. In addition, linking girls’ education to feminist and women’s development discourses helps to broaden our understanding of the interface between women’s education and women’s development as the study illuminates the successes and challenges that face adolescent girls and the role that schools play or are not playing in preparing them for the future.

1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 2 is the contextual background to the study. It focuses on the development of education in Kenya but gives special attention to gender. It examines the growth of education in general and the expansion of girls’ education under the 7-4-3-2 and 8-4-4 systems of education. The framing of gender in key policy documents is examined and the implications on girls’ education deliberated.
Chapter 3 is the theoretical framework of the study. Using feminism theories as a framework, arguments are made that the education of women in sub-Saharan Africa is of necessity tied to their socio-economic well-being. In this respect and in a very broad sense, the chapter attempts to make a link between girls’ education choices and education for the development of women. It begins by locating the education of girls within the broad context of socio-economic development. With girls’ education as the focus, the chapter explores various concepts that are pertinent to education equity such as equality of education opportunity, gender parity and gender equity. The chapter concludes that even though there has been improvement in female access to education as a consequence of liberal feminist policies in education, the real challenges and obstacles to gender equity lie in the lens through which education equality is perceived. For better clarity into the intricacies of gender equity in context, the chapter combines various feminism perspectives for the examination of girls’ experiences of schooling, explication of the ways in which they process and construct choices, preferences and decisions on school subjects, careers and higher education.

Chapter 4 is the methodology chapter. It examines the concept of research inquiry as well as the paradigms. It makes a case for the integration of qualitative and quantitative data in an interpretive multiple case study.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are referred to as the case study chapters: that is, a chapter is allotted to Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican. The chapters present quantitative and qualitative data findings and are structured in a similar way.

Chapter 8 is the discussion and analysis of findings. The discussion is done on each case and across the three case studies.

Chapter 9 summarises and concludes the study. It reflects on each aspect of the study including the aims of the study, the theory used and the methodology. It considers the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2

FRAMING THE CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter situates girls’ education within gender, equality and education discourse. It has four sections including this introduction. The second is an overview of education developments in Kenya from the colonial to the current period. The third highlights the status of gender equality and related developments in the same period. It examines the treatment of gender in education policies and the status and framing of gender under the 8-4-4 system of education. This section argues the need to consider features of substantive equality in the examination of gender issues in education. The chapter concludes by making a case for a critical interpretation of gender, equality and education as a means of better understanding of what shapes girls’ educational choices, aspirations and preferences.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

According to Ollenburger and Moore (1992:104), “education structures patterns in women’s lives. How much education and the type of education we receive influence the work and economic rewards available to us”. Unarguably, the type of education that one is exposed to has a bearing on education output and outcomes, however, besides that, education output and outcomes are also shaped by the social, economic and political influences of the day. It makes sense therefore to consider what has become of education when it is intertwined with socio-cultural history as Kenya has a record of commissions of inquiry that are linked to the restructuring of education, the development of education polices and, invariably, the treatment of gender within education.

Education in post-independent Kenya has undergone two significant changes, both of which have had the overall aim of improving education access and quality. The Report of the National Committee on Education Objectives also known as the Ominde Commission Report of 1964 (Republic of Kenya, (RoK), 1964) initiated the dismantling of the racially segregated colonial education system. The key focus of the commission was to infuse national consciousness and foster a new national identity. The deracialisation of education in Kenya
took shape quite rapidly and more or less within the first decade of independence. This was the first fundamental change to the education system.

Human capital theory as associated with Becker (1975) asserts that education creates skills, which facilitate higher levels of productivity. This means that typically, education should be a pathway to a country’s social and economic development and growth. The Ominde Commission report was concerned with the role of education in Kenya’s economic growth and development but it remained unclear on how education was to be linked to productivity in the socio-economic development sense. Yet, there was growing need for a skilled labour force at independence. The rapid expansion of primary and secondary education and the unemployment the characterised the first two decades indicated that the link had yet to be established for education to yield meaningful gains. By the seventies, Kenya was beginning to record significant economic development, because of the coffee boom and not education. Alongside a thriving economy, was increasing unemployment that drew attention to the quality and relevance of education necessitating a change to the education system (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 1972). Gender was among the issues education disparities identified in this report, but it received lukewarm attention.

The second change in education involved the restructuring of schooling and the national curriculum (RoK, 1976; 1981; 1988). The change to the 8-4-4 education system, which is still considered the greatest overhaul to education in Kenya (see section 2.2.3 for detailed discussion), aimed at improving education relevance and quality and eradicating inequalities linked to gender and socio-economic class. The change occurred in 1986 but still, education inequalities particularly those concerning gender have remained widespread. While blame can be traced to the fact that neither the Ominde Commission of 1964 nor the Kamunge Commission of 1988 dealt with the fundamental flaws affecting gender in the education system, the current flaws can be traced to the fact that both commissions were dealing with an education system that was fundamentally unchanged from colonial times.

Though gender inequalities in girls’ education in Africa is well documented (see Gordon, Nkwe and Graven, 1998; Stromquist, 1998; Colclough, Al-Samarrai, Rose, and Tembon, 2003), the origins and context contribute to the intricacies unique to individual countries. This is the case in Kenya.
The missionaries first introduced formal schooling in Kenya in 1844 (Sifuna, 1990:114; Jones, 1924:120). Kenya’s education has since been formal Western. These inherited formal Western education systems were hierarchal in structure and when combined with already existing socially stratified gender structures, gendering within education thrived and still does.

In an essay on women’s education and class formation in Africa, Robertson (1986) records that the rapid growth of Western type education after independence contributed to the disempowerment rather than empowerment of women. Drawing from observations made between 1950 and 1980 she says the following about women and education: “rather than leading the way to equality and greater opportunity, then, education for most in Africa functions as an instrument of oppression to reinforce subordinate roles” (ibid., 1986:92). For the majority of women unable to access education beyond primary school, education becomes a dysfunctional feature in that it inadequately prepares them for the competitive skill-based labour market and while they are in school it consumes their time and prevents them from engaging in the socio-economic activities within the informal sectors. This is the paradox within female education in Kenya. There are contradictions because there is yet to be critical assessment of the successes and failures of education change and education polices first introduced by missionaries and later by the Kenyan government. With the exception of politically instigated commissions of inquiry, the development and growth of education in Kenya is devoid of critique particularly with regard to gender, education and equality and, more importantly, the intricacies of education equality with respect to girls’ education, many of which require one to examine education holistically and look beyond school enrolment statistics.

2.2.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION
There is consensus that education developments in Kenya have occurred in four distinct phases (Otiende, Wamahi and Karugu, 1992; Sifuna, 1990). Though the treatment of gender has not been distinctly different in each phase, it is important to note that colonial education – the foundation of formal education in Kenya – established a legacy of institutionalised inequality, which has largely remained unchallenged. An examination of how this has occurred facilitates a better understanding of gender patterns in secondary education and also paves the way for explanations as to why girls experience schooling the way they do and what they make of the education choices they have.
The first phase, up to 1920, is associated with traditional African education and the advent of missionary education. In the second phase, between 1920 and 1945, there was an expansion of colonial African education through the establishment of missionary schools. In the third phase, from 1945 to 1963 there were significant changes within colonial African education, in particular the establishment of secondary and higher education. Finally, from 1963 to the current period, there is continued expansion in secondary and increased demand for higher education. Missionary and colonial African education is significant to secondary education in post-independent Kenya. In the next section, I examine the heritage of modern Western education, missionary/colonial trusteeship and the pedagogy of difference, which is the end result of these two phases of education, and set the background against which I develop arguments on the treatment and status of gender in education in Kenya.

2.2.1.1 The continued heritage of Western education

The modern Western education as we know it today goes back to late sixteenth century Europe when educational thought had begun to change significantly as humanistic influences challenged the then widespread Christian tradition (Bowen, 1981:1; Lawson and Silver, 1973:91). There was “a serious literature of discontent” (Bowen, 1981:1). In addition, “a growing number of thinkers significantly began to argue that much was fundamentally wrong with education as it was being conducted and that reforms had to be made” (ibid.). As criticism became readily accepted radical and reformist thought became infused into the intellectual life of Europe exerting “increasingly stronger influences on education practices, curricula and institutions” (Bowen 1981:1). In England the first impact of the reformation on education came with the declaration of royal supremacy over the church in 1534 (Bowen, 1981:95) and sixteenth century humanism changed medieval attitudes to women, particularly those in the upper classes. They gained more access to schooling and in effect grammar schools expanded. The poor also began to access education through charity schools while technical and vocational training became an established form of education. University education, particularly, traditional education in Oxford and Cambridge, also came under scrutiny (ibid.)

Following a new Church/State partnership, the reforms that occurred within education in England and Scotland were to have far reaching significance in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Protestant supremacy, which had lasting influence on English education (Bowen 1981:14), had far-reaching consequences on education in British colonies where missionaries
had began to introduce formal Western education. Formal education in the Kenya colony thrived because of the church/state trusteeship. These developments notwithstanding, it is important to note that colonial interests took precedence, and at the time, there was a particular purpose for the education of Africans. It is a purpose that prevailed long after the missionaries had left, shaping Kenya’s education in post independence.

As early as 1924, the role of education in the colonies was differentiated by race. Compared to European education, whose broad curriculum paved way for immediate and long-term opportunities in the job market or in further education, the education for Africans offered little else than how to be a good boy. The Phelps Stokes Report of 1924 recommended that education for Africans be guided by the values of “moral regeneration” (Jones, 1924:8). Though moral regeneration might be noble in its intents the problem with it in 1924 is that it emphasised religious morality and offered little else in terms of curriculum.

Among the features of neo-colonialism, education neo-colonialism is perhaps one of the most entrenched and enduring. Education for moral regeneration has endured in most French and British colonies (Watson, 1982b:181). Today in Kenya, the legacy prevails in a school curriculum that enforces a mandatory Christian, Islamic and Hindu religious education curriculum in all grades of primary school and in FI and FII in secondary school (see RoK, 1964; 1984; 1988). However, unlike in the West where feminism has been critical of gender bias emanating from religious order and statutes and the perceived discriminatory implications on school curriculum (Reuther, 1974), this curriculum incorporates Christian, Islamic and Hindu values and traditions.

2.2.1.2 Kenyan education under the colonial / missionary trusteeship
Christian missionaries were the founders of Western education in most parts of Africa (Sifuna 1990:112). Though they worked in partnership with the colonial government, a role which complemented the aims the colonial government had for African education, the missionary focus remained moral regeneration. In fact, “early schools grew out of the desire to win converts” (Sifuna, 1990:50). The schools grew in number and missionary activities thrived, but African education has since come under critic (Watson, 1982b:181). Questions have been raised with regard to the purpose and value for this education and the implications on education in post independent African countries.
On the one hand, apologists for colonial rule have argued of the need for these ‘civilising missions’ from Europe (Mayhew, 1938; Lugard, 1926). On the other, advocates for social justice like Freire (1971) and Carnoy, (1974) have questioned the objectives of these missions, and even attacked them on grounds of cultural imperialism. While it is not my intention to delve into apologetics and conspiracy theory around colonial education, it is important to take cognisance of these debates in order to understand better where formal education in Kenya originates and also so that the current state of girls’ education is accurately situated.

Western education in Kenya was formalised by the Fraser Education Commission of 1909, the same commission endorsed a racially segregated education. Watson (1982a:11) describes this as “the period of laissez-faire” because the “British governments [presumably all over British colonies] largely ignored education, being more concerned with the maintenance of law and order, defence and economic development (exploitation)”. Though the colonial government in Kenya bore the mandate to oversee education, it catered for the education of Europeans and was largely uncommitted to investing in education for Africans. This gave missionaries the authority to establish the standard for African education. Missionaries focused on basic technical training for Africans, providing the semi-skilled labour the colonialists required to develop the colony. They also used education to effectively evangelise and easily secured approval to continue with their work from the Education Commission for the East African Protectorate of 1919 because their focus was basic education (Otiende et al., 1992; Sifuna, 1990). With a focus in spiritual and moral values, education for Africans was rudimentary did not pose any real threat to colonial hierarchy.

It is important to note that despite the questionable objectives for education, it is the missionaries and not the colonial government that pioneered basic education for women. In some parts of Africa, they opened up schools in inaccessible rural areas and in tribal areas where the colonial government had no interest (Watson, 1982a:13; Ubah, 1980:374). Because of prohibitive costs, there was no motivation to provide secondary education for Africans generally, until much later. With only a basic education Africans had limited opportunities.

This social and cultural history reasonably explains why much of sub-Saharan Africa lacks a legacy of post primary education, especially for women. Colonial education was never intended to benefit the development of the African which concurs with the observation that
“the progress of education was affected by the economic requirement of self sufficiency” (Whitehead, 1982:53). Self preservation also explains why the colonial government argued that “the spread of schooling could be ruinously expensive” (ibid.) when demands were made for increased education opportunities for Africans. For Kenya, promotion beyond basic education was perceived as unimportant because it was only going to serve individual interests, whereas the interests and objectives of the government at the time were to begin developing the agricultural potential of the colony. In fact, it is only in the period between the First and Second World Wars that the colonial government began to take an interest in secondary education, primarily because colonialism was under challenge and the independence of the colonies was imminent. While there was obviously some kind of chronological order to these developments, of more importance to this study is the connection to secondary education for girls.

By the early 1920s, the education of Africans was rapidly expanding without a coherent policy on education (Sifuna, 1990). Reacting to the demand and acting on low finances, the missionaries modelled colonial African education on the Lancasterian monitorial system, the infant school system and the Bell system used for the working classes in England (Gomersall, 1994:237; Sifuna, 1990:42). Monitorial schools “aimed to discipline the infant poor to good and orderly habits, to train them early to piety” (Lawson and Silver, 1973:239). The advantage of this education was that it was low cost and accessible to the poor (Bowen, 1981:294; Lawson and Silver, 1973:239). The drawback was that it accorded more importance to the social group than to the individual, leading to rote learning. In the colonial Kenya, the understaffed missionaries took advantage of large classes and taught a curriculum for “practical and patriotic purposes” focused on low-skilled industrial education. The subjects taught included English (reading and writing), arithmetic and Christian practice (Sifuna, 1990). The schools produced Africans that were semi-skilled, moral and religious (Otiende et al., 1992:46; Sifuna, 1990:41, Ubah, 1980:377), more or less extensions of earlier evangelistic initiatives.

As stated earlier in this section, the Phelps Stokes Report of 1924 sanctioned missionary involvement in African education (Jones, 1924). But, it is important to note that the report was progressive in its thinking. Considering the racialised nature of education then it was quite significant that the report suggested a need for secondary education for Africans. The report qualified that such an education should meet local needs; which in the Kenyan case lay
in agricultural education (Watson, 1982a:20). African education was slowly becoming important to the sustainability of the emerging economy. The report endorsed increased funding for African education through grants-in-aid (Otiende et al. 1992:63). This only helped to strengthen government/missionary trusteeship over African education. As colonial government interest in African education grew so did the financial investment. School enrolment among Africans improved compared with that of other races, but distribution was low. Female participation remained low at all levels of education (Sifuna, 1990:131). While a general lack of interest in education is known to have enforced differentiated school enrolment there were other socially engineered factors responsible for the gendered patterns in African education.

Administrative regions in Kenya are geographical but, regional demarcations align themselves to ethnic boundaries. Though ethnicity was not a key factor of interest to the colonial government, it is important to note that colonial African education was shaped by the economic development interests of the colonial government. Particular regions of the country therefore drew more interest and investment than others (Prewitt, 1974:205).

In its review on colonial African education, the Phelps Stoke Report of 1924 describes the coastal area as “comparatively unimportant” despite 8% (40,000) of the 500,000 native children from the area being enrolled in schools located there (Jones, 1924:114). It goes on to describe the north eastern region as an area that “can hardly be considered educationally at present time owing to the nomadic life of the native people” and indeed at the time, only 6% (30,000) of children were enrolled in school (ibid.). The decision not to invest educationally in these two regions was based on lack of economic potential. These preferences are legacies of self preservation and are evidenced in the contrasting differences among the eight regions in Kenya. There are regions that are ‘educationally deprivation’ and others that are ‘educationally privilege’. Deprivation and privilege occur at all levels of education and are especially manifest in gender.

The provision of colonial African education concentrated mainly in the southwestern region of the country where the colonial government had investment interests in the agricultural potential of the region. The favourable climate attracted a high concentration of missionary settlement (Jones, 1924:14) sanctioning the region as high potential. The combined interests of the colonial government and the missionaries gave rise to a thriving agricultural sector,
which after independence sustained the expansion of education in Central, Eastern and Western Provinces. Even with such advantages, the situation was different for girls’ education in these provinces. Girls’ education developed very slowly.

By 1936, the percentage of African pupils had increased. Enrolment in elementary schools was 96.7% but decreased in primary (3.1%) and even much less in secondary school (0.1%) (Sifuna, 1990). Secondary schools were few in number and there were significant gender imbalances. Of the total number of Africans (129,007) enrolled in primary schools in 1938, barely 30% (39,179) were girls (ibid: 140).

It is notable that the struggle to develop girls’ education began to emerge as investments in secondary education began to be made.

As early as 1909 in Kiambu, local women through their network with the local missions appealed to the colonial district commissioner court to establish schooling for girls. This was the first request ever made for formal schooling for girls. By 1910 female enrolment in primary school was 56, rising to 1,021 in 1926 (Sifuna, 1990:140). Despite the interest and potential for expansion, the priority on education was still given to boys and worse, social culture compounded female access to education.

The wide rift between the colonial government, the Kikuyu community and the missionaries reported in Sheffield (1973) and Presley (1992) was the result of the local community’s insistence that they continue the practice of female circumcision even as girls proceeded with education. Social-cultural intricacies play and bring forth contradictions in girls’ education. In this case, in the struggle for dominance between missionaries and traditional Kikuyu leadership, women became pawns in the game of power and control. As female education became highly contested, there was little support for it financially. Funds voted for by the Local Native Council\(^3\) did not allocate anything to female education.

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\(^3\) Local Native Council (LNC) was the name given to the traditional kiama by the then Governor in 1908. The new body was to work as a grassroots administrative arm of the colonial government. One of the first things the LNC was mandated to do was to put a stop to traditional customs that the missionaries and colonial government did not approve of, such as female circumcision. The traditional kiama was a ruling council of elders and its membership excluded women, which was also the case in the LNC.
By 1935, Kikuyu women were once again pressing for more; they wanted more than the ‘domestic’ curriculum. In addition they insisted on facilities equivalent to those in boys’ schools, education to higher levels and more subjects. By 1936, the Catholic missionaries, the Church Missionary Society and the African Inland Mission in Kijabe had begun to open mission schools in Limuru, Kijabe respectively (Presley, 1992:100). The Kikuyu Mission School, (the now famous Alliance Girls’ High School), also the first secondary school to open its doors to African girls in Kenya was established in 1938 (Smith, 1973). Like the other mission schools, of the time education included a domestic science curriculum that specialised in homemaking skills such as sewing, cooking, nutrition and general hygiene. This curriculum hoped to create ‘modern’ housewives out of African girls. Fortunately, 1938 to 1948 witnessed progressive, though isolated, changes in girls’ education. Girls from Alliance Girls’ High School were allowed to pursue secondary education at the neighbouring boys’ school - Alliance High School. By 1939 there were secondary schools offering Africans a four-year secondary education with an academic and technical curriculum leading to the African School Certificate. These were Alliance, Maseno, Yala and Kabaa. The four were and still are all boys’ schools. The inclusion of girls in Alliance High School was therefore a significant development in terms of gender recognition. The move signified that education opportunities were eventually going to open for girls regardless of the fact that the structure in education favoured males.

Many reasons have been put forward in an attempt to explain why female participation in education differed from that of boys in these early years. Whitehead (1982:57) for instance has argued that the acute shortage of female teachers acted as a deterrent to female participation in schooling. Others like Prewitt (1974) cite lack of schools. Early marriage also interfered with the continuity of girls’ education but was worsened by the lack of secondary schools. Even girls determined enough to complete primary education were forced to terminate their education at the primary school level. Other out of school factors known to compound school wastage include low attribution to girls and their schooling. In school factors include sexual harassment, lack of female teachers especially in rural and hardship areas, late enrolment and grade repetition, lack of guidance and counselling, low opinions among teachers about girls’ academic abilities and poor sanitation (Elimu Yetu Coalition 2005: 108).
My contention is that all these factors worked together to militate against girls’ continued progress with post primary education. In addition, the lack of secondary schools for girls sent different messages about the value of education for males and females. Nevertheless, girls’ education was not taken seriously, the underlying reason being that there was a social and cultural cost to girls’ education.

The education of girls comes at price as it has social, cultural and economic implications. According to Prewitt (1974) in the 1930s most communities were still traditional; education was informal and integrated in the roles and responsibilities expected of each gender. Girls who chose to pursue formal education and attend school placed themselves in a precarious position as the vital role that women played as homemakers and food producers was at risk. Their being in school was considered an economic loss to the household. The few that were able to make the transition from fulltime homemaker to fulltime scholar did so because of sheer will power given that for the majority, the termination of education usually occurred before the end of primary school.

Today the gains on female education have increased tremendously, however, wherever gendered socio-cultural practices remain unchallenged and retrogressive practices abound, female education is still counted as an economic loss. This is the case in the North Eastern province where female genital mutilation and early marriage hinder girls from accessing school or continuing with it (Kakonge, Kimea, Gitachu, Nyamu, 2001; Elimu Yetu Coalition, 2005). For the more developed regions of the country, where the gains on education are considered to be higher, there are still losses only that they are less overt. Mungai (2002), Barng’etuny (1999) and Kitetu (1998) report that in Central Province and Rift Valley Province domestic chores count for the loss of two-thirds of girls study time. Such loss contributes to low quality of academic and non academic performance. Similar loss of time is not reported for boys.

It is hardly debateable that colonial African education was an inferior kind of education. It is, however, important to recognise that a poor education system was not entirely to blame for the low female participation in education in these early years. As explained above, education has to be examined within the context of broader societal norms and values. Only that way, does it become clearer why gender impedes upon educational opportunities for females in more severe ways than it does for males. Kenya is by and large a society made of
communities that adhere to patriarchal cultural values. Patriarchal societies hold strong values on gender (see 3.4.3) and these tend to be blended into emerging social structures without much questioning, as has been the case with formal education. In any such society, female education comes with a cost because of social gradation.

Traditional African communities had non-formal systems to educate. Instruction was divided into learning for males and female and the informal curriculum prioritised gender roles and expectations (Kenyatta, 1938). When formal education was introduced in African communities there was in existence what Bennaars (1995:27) refers to as “pedagogy of difference”. The pedagogy of difference is a mode of teaching and learning that stresses differences rather than the similarities (ibid.). It thrives on social stratification such that found in patriarchal societies. It perpetuates the differences of gender.

The Kikuyu, who occupy the Central Province of Kenya, are a patriarchal community (Kenyatta, 1938; Mbiti, 1969). Before the introduction of formal Western education, non-formal educational instruction thrived on the discourses of inequality embedded in the traditional way of life. Although missionaries established themselves and evangelised among this community, patriarchal order remained more or less unchallenged. Because of the value system, boys were more favoured than girls. In addition, the roles and responsibilities instituted by the patriarchal social order placed restrictions on female access to schooling and so the beneficiaries of formal schooling when it was introduced were male and predominantly the sons of community leaders because they could afford it (see Sifuna, 1990). Colonial African education denied girls equal education opportunities because it thrived on pedagogy of difference.

So far, it is evident that social, cultural and economic factors are contentious where gender, equality and education are concerned. The indication is that roles and expectations associated with womanhood and femininity come to bear where female education is concerned. These create a very important backdrop against which all deliberations on girls’ education should be made. They warrant further discussion.

In 1929, the Kikuyu Karing’a Education Association and Kikuyu Independent Schools Association demanded that missionaries renounce their position on the practice of female circumcision if they wanted girls to enrol in school (Otiende et al., 1992:51). As the
missionaries stood their ground, the association established ‘independent’ schools which, they claimed, “would preserve and improve African culture” (ibid.51-52). This dispute demonstrates the social and cultural values of the Kikuyu woman and the extent to which formal education was perceived as a threat to traditional practices that kept women under male control. The defiant stand taken by the community exemplifies the adamant stand a society is willing to take when gender roles come under threat and male control comes under question.

The complex play of a masculine hegemony also emerges. Access to formal schooling in the colonial period was more difficult for girls than boys because of the social value ascribed gender by traditional communities. These social values are the same ones that sustained a masculine hegemony. In this particular case, questioning the Kikuyu traditional practice of female circumcision was questioning masculine power. The mounting pressure to stop the practice gave those in leadership (males of course!), warrant to withdraw girls from school. The interplay of this masculine cultural hegemony on female education is not uncommon in Kenya today. Girls continue to be withdrawn from school for the same reason given to the missionaries in 1929.

Female circumcision is one of the earliest documented social realities affecting the continuity of education among Kenyan girls (Sheffield, 1973). It is contested terrain, which requires all that denounce it to reject “cultural adaptation” (Sifuna, 1990:47). Though female circumcision is not the point of this study, the practice is aligned to forms of cultural identity that were then incompatible with values and practices espoused in formal Western education. The conflict resulting from the irreconcilable cultural differences continues to compound girls’ education today, and constitutes the social realities that make the education of girls a complex social phenomenon.

As I have said before there is a contextual backdrop against which female education should be deliberated. According to Bennaars (1995:27), “the traditional pedagogy of difference is reflected in the social theory of male domination and female subjugation”. He argues that “theory directly supported the system of patriarchy, therefore promoted a pedagogy that explicitly and commandingly differentiated between the genders”. This positioning is the sexist stereotyping that elevates men to positions of advantage. It is the “gender regime” described by Connell (cited in Taylor, 1995:7; see also Connell, 1987) as prevalent in most
societies. Both traditional non-formal education and colonial African education did not endeavour to challenge this regime. Among other reasons, the regime existed among the Kikuyu community because gender distinctions and societal obligations were accorded to the social group rather than to the individual. Gendered societal obligations continue to permeate choice and preferences where the individual is concerned (see the tensions in Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

From the discussion so far, it is not difficult to see why girls and women receive the bottom end of an already inferior education. Though colonial African education was a ‘new’ education that endeavoured to develop industry among the Africans, the education could not have been any different because there was little else on which to establish it except a social division that defined everything - from division of labour to leadership duties - according to gender. In traditional Kikuyu society, women were involved in crop production and family care, and attended to women’s social concerns. Men were involved in animal husbandry and the maintenance of the social group, which included attending to political and judicial matters (Kenyatta, 1938). According to Wamahiu (1996:48), gender differentiation begins early in life within traditional societies and is “internalised by participation in daily life as well as by various rituals and practices”. Colonial African education helped to reinforce gender differentiation as normal. For this reason, colonial African education was especially disadvantageous for girls. Girls trained for domestic work (see Winter cited in Vavrus, 2002:374 for girls education in Tanzania). The subjects they studied were basic and inadequate for transition to higher levels of education. The ‘new skills’ acquired were also too limited to alter or challenge the social perception of women’s place in the gender hierarchy. To a large extent, colonial African education helped to endorse gender differentiation and the disempowerment women.

2.2.1.3 Pedagogy of difference: The case of secondary education in Kenya

Eighty years after the establishment of the first missionary school in 1844, the colonial government was ambivalent about the future of African education. Although there were secondary schools for Africans, the lack of commitment to financing an academic secondary education hindered expansion.

Serious commitment by the colonial government to secondary education was finally enforced because of mounting socio-political pressure from African war veterans whose exposure
overseas had brought them to the realisation that Western education was going to be vital to the liberation struggle (Otiende et al., 1992). The recommendations of the Beecher Report of 1949 also contributed to secondary education becoming an important item on the government’s agenda (Ibid., 1992:49).

By 1955, there were 17 secondary schools and, for the first time, there were female candidates for the secondary school leaving examination, then known as African School Certificate. This was significant in terms of female inclusion even though girls were only 2.7% (7) of the total number of candidates (252). By 1960, the number of secondary schools had risen to 32 and though the number of females taking the secondary leaving examination had increased the figure was low (8.5%), compared with the 900 males enrolled in school at the time (ibid.)

With the independence of the Kenyan colony imminent, the debates around education took shape around the political, social and cultural issues that were important then. The more superior academic education offered in European schools instigated a demand for better quality academic education for Africans. These demands permeated debates and founded the reasons for the rejection of the technical and agriculture based education that the government wanted to give Africans, much as it was relevant given that the majority of them were rural folk. The decision to offer a secondary education that was more academic was also tied to the perceived social and economic capital associated with white-collar jobs.

In part, one does agree with Whitehead (1982:58) that the false visualisation of a static rural society on the part of colonial policy makers was also to blame for the rejection of this technical and agriculture based education.

By the time of Kenya’s independence in 1963, a new policy enforced the integration of Asian and African children into formerly white schools through special government grants for high achieving students (Otiende et al., 1992:46). Unfortunately, these schools were unattractive because they were still racially divided in their culture and ethos.

The other more important factor is that Africans lacked a legacy of post primary education and so participation in secondary education was low. Of a school-age population of 829,700, only 1.3% (10,593) African children were enrolled in secondary school in 1963, compared with 98.9% Europeans from a school-age population of 3,300. For Asians it was 80.0% from
a school-age population of 17,200 and 9.4% for Arabs from a school-age population of 3,100 (Sifuna, 1990:76).

Females continued to lag behind males in secondary education in both access and completion. At independence in 1963, the percentage of girls completing secondary education was low: only 13.3% (199) of girls were scheduled to take the secondary school leaving certificate examination compared with 86.7% (1292) boys (Sifuna, 1990:149). The pattern was similar in higher education. Only 335 Kenyans were enrolled in university within East Africa and 1,576 abroad. Among these 85 were in science and technology related disciplines (Otiende et al., 1992:76). Though these particular enrollment statistics were not disaggregated, a tracer study conducted on new graduates by Kimani (2000) revealed gendered patterns meaning that enrollment in university at independence must have been low among females. Both Sifuna (1990) and Kimani (2000) confirm that female representation in university continues to be low, ironically even as there continues to be increased female enrollment in secondary school.

In conclusion, one could argue that participation in secondary education was low at independence because the colonial government had no concrete investment agenda for post primary education for Africans. Though the lack of secondary schools contributed to inaccessibility, the treatment of gender in traditional societies favoured males rendering access to and survival in school more difficult for females. In addition, because of the laissez faire education policies that marked the early development of colonial African education, there was no conscious effort to encourage female participation so girls were left out because of discriminative social and cultural practices at home and because of non-inclusive education policies. For boys the social, cultural and economic contexts at home and within formal education favoured them and secured them a head start. Not discussing these features is choosing to discount salient aspects to the establishment and development of education and schooling in Kenya.

2.2.2 THE LEGACY OF BRITISH EDUCATION AT INDEPENDENCE

It is difficult to speak about education in Kenya without the mention of its historical development and legacy. Education is shaped by what is around it and as already discussed, the impact of Western education on education in African colonies goes as far back as the sixteenth century. In terms of ideology, developments and changes in education have always
been shaped by intellectual thought and philosophies. Kenya’s education was established on a British education system. British education was influenced and shaped by a random collection of influences some of which include the philosophies and thinking of founding fathers of sociology Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim. Education has since continued to be refined by other thinking. Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) is associated with the refinement of functionalist theories and in particular functionalist analysis. He thinking has shaped the ‘functional agendas’ of most education systems. According to Feinberg and Soltis (1992:22):

Functionalism has served as more than just a scientific theory used to understand the role that schools and other institutions play in society. It has also served as a theoretical guide for people interested in the reform and improvement of modern society … it has served both as a scientific foundation and the justification for many different kinds of educational reform in the twentieth century.

Functionalist theories order how social events and institutions are to be viewed and so in Kenya, where the state finances education and the establishment and legitimising of civic institutions such as schools, the state is a pivotal actor in education and social development (Fuller, 1991:30-31). For this reason, understanding the social context that shape education, identifying the stakeholders and partners involved in education and in-depth understanding of the purpose for change and reform within education is critical for a holistic understanding of educational dynamics and intricacies. This is important for national reform as it is for educational choice making processes among girls in rural secondary schools.

The Hadow Report of 1926 aimed at ending the parallel systems of elementary and secondary education with an “end-on system of primary and secondary education” (Lawson and Silver, 1973:385). By raising the elementary education of older children to ‘secondary’, it legally raised the school leaving age to fifteen, a necessary move then given that the poverty, juvenile unemployment and economic depression in some parts of England (ibid.:386). Motivated by the social and political facts of the time, and the understanding that education is critical in the management of social change, this new structure aimed to make secondary education accessible to all children in England. The ‘bi-partite’ system as it became known from the recommendations of the Hadow Report, abolished school fees, a major factor hindering access. Different types of curriculum in secondary school were introduced depending on age and capability (Lawson and Silver, 1973:393).
Further changes to education in England occurred on the recommendations of the 1938 Spens Report. The 11 plus exam was retained but under the tripartite system. Opportunities were created for students to continue with education in one of three schools: the Grammar school for those who passed the 11 plus examination, the Secondary Technical for those with academically weaker scores (in reality there weren’t many Secondary Technical schools), or the Secondary Modern. In terms of education access, survival and output, this system was successful. It increased secondary school enrolment and school standards (Lawson and Silver, 1973:388-389). However, there was still a major divisive factor.

The 11 plus exam soon became unpopular. It was seen as an I.Q. test, and an unfair way to decide a pupil’s future at the age of eleven. Although many of those who failed the exam secured qualifications at secondary modern schools, they were branded failures. Arguments that education still favoured some over others flourished, particularly when it was established that middle class parents were able to help and train their children to pass the 11 plus exams, whereas working class parents could not. The system was said to perpetuate social class divisions (ibid.). The paradox lay in the fact that even though access to school was guaranteed to all, the selective criterion in later stages of schooling forced British children into different educational paths. The eventual outcomes of this system were patterned along gender and social class. England’s tripartite system is very similar to the now defunct 7-4-2-3 system of education. Under the 7-4-2-3 students were forced to pursue different educational paths depending on their performance at the end of four years of secondary education. The differences this created in the long term became point of criticism of the system in the Koech Report (RoK, 1999).

In 1944, the enactment of the Butler Education Act collapsed this controversial hierarchal system into three progressive stages, namely primary education, secondary education and higher education (Judge, 1984; Lawson and Silver, 1973:417). In 1964, the Labour Government re-organised secondary education along the lines of a comprehensive education (Judge, 1984). Despite major reforms, equal but selective education remains the most enduring feature instituted in British education. The same is the case in Kenya under the 8-4-4 education system.
The adaptation of England’s ‘tri-partite’ education systems in Kenya’s education explains the root of meritocracy in Kenya’s education system. The Parsonian perspective upholds that education can be an efficient mechanism of equalisation and social justice, as long as it operates in accordance with meritocratic equality criteria (Parsons, 1961). Meritocracy is advanced as natural and socially desirable on this criterion. The problem with this system of education in Kenya is that it perpetuates social class distinctions within education. The now defunct 7-4-3-2 system was introduced in Kenya’s education in 1966. Though it availed educational opportunities, it advantaged some over others depending on social class (see 2.2.3 for detailed discussion). The current 8-4-4 system of education attempted to flatten the hierarchy but, underpinning it is a legacy of meritocracy that is difficult to remove when the society itself is highly stratified.

Where social differentiation is accentuated; education has to advantage some over others. For women and girls, the disadvantage can sometimes be double.

Interestingly, there are similarities between liberal feminism ideals and meritocracy as an ideology. Liberal feminism holds the assumption that females can rise equally through educational hierarchies as well as males can for as long as equal opportunities are availed to them. The reality is that only the most capable individuals really manage to advance. Equal opportunities for all does not always lead to equal outcomes for all. In the case of secondary education in Kenya, males have had a head start which girls cannot catch up with even when opportunities are availed to them. Coupled with the fact that changes to education structures in Kenya, are made within a socially hierarchal system, the ‘equality’ of opportunity is narrower for girls.

2.2.3 EDUCATION SINCE INDEPENDENCE

Education plays a vital role in the formation of individuals, their value systems, and their perceptions and understanding of themselves. It shapes the individuals who become the foundation and means to social and economic development. Since education is strongly linked to development, the government of Kenya at independence adopted an approach to education with similarities to a functionalist one. As the financier, the government took direct responsibility for physical expansion of education. It also took responsibility for the ideological change that was necessary for the integration of the then racially diverse Kenyan
communities and the creation of the human resource that would develop education in the new independent state. Alongside the creation of a new national consciousness and national identity, the initial challenges to social and economic development were the eradication of poverty, disease and ignorance. It is in view of this target that the Ominde Commission (first commission on education in independent Kenya) made recommendations for a single non-racial education (RoK, 1965). To achieve this goal, it became necessary to increase the access to schools and the quality of education for Africans (RoK, 1965:25). The Ominde Commission restructured education to include seven years’ primary, four years’ secondary, two years’ advanced secondary and three years university education. The 7-4-2-3 system of education, as it became known was introduced in 1966; it was a public education for all Kenyans (Otiende et al., 1992:109). Changes in the curricula included the teaching of African history; Kiswahili to create a new nationalistic identity. Agriculture and technical subjects were also re-introduced because of the relevance they had to national development. Though curricula that encouraged the superiority of British cultural values was discarded the new curricula was very academic. Beyond this, there was no ideological change to education and schools that were previously racially divided continued to bear the culture and ethos of the respective race.

The 7-4-2-3 system was hierarchal and competitive. Merit determined promotion from primary to secondary, to advanced secondary and to university. As the demand for education became higher than the supply of schools low, merit became firmly established as a criterion for entry into schools creating a hierarchy in schooling. The merit based admission system elevated the status of former European schools. The few former European schools, became known as ‘high cost’ schools. They attracted the emerging black Kenyan middle class while the ‘low cost’ were for the ordinary Kenyan. Though school fees differentiated the two categories, the quality of resources and the range of subjects offered in the curriculum was different and so the difference between the schools was even wider. Differences between schools accentuated the problem of school access for those from poor socio-economic backgrounds, particularly rural girls (see Mungai, 2002). The problem was further compounded by high enrolment in primary schools, against a disproportionate number of secondary schools. Though all secondary schools are simply called public schools, the legacy of ‘high cost’ ‘low cost’ schooling prevails and transition from primary to secondary school remains a challenge because of cost and lack of schools.
By the early eighties when the government was considering making structural changes to the education system (RoK, 1988), the growth rate in school enrolment in primary education was 19.8% and 9.3% in secondary schools. With female enrolment at 48% and 38.2% respectively (RoK, 1997), there was sufficient evidence that transition from primary to secondary school was a problem and worse, for females.

The Gachathi Report of 1979 had earlier criticised the 7-4-2-3 education system for being too academic (RoK, 1976). The report also recommended a scientific, pre-vocational and craft oriented curriculum for secondary education (RoK, 1976) as concerns were raised that the curriculum lacked technology education, relied on rote learning and memorisation and created a bottleneck at the secondary level (RoK, 1988: v). Recommendations for the demarcation of academic and technical education were also raised (Ibid., 1988: v). Similar criticisms arose in the MacKay Report of 1981, following which it was recommended that education be entirely restructured (Otiende et al., 1992:111; RoK, 1981). The major changes included the restructuring of the number of schooling years, curriculum content and assessment modes (ibid., 1981). It was envisaged that the new education system would have a curriculum that was more science and technology based and that the entire education system would be “movement away from being examination centred” (RoK, 1988: v).

In January 1985, the 7-4-2-3 system of education was replaced by the 8-4-4 system. The structural change was introduced in upper primary school rather than lower primary school. In December of the same year, the first Standard 8 class took the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education Examinations (KCPE) the primary leaving examination (RoK, 1988:6). In January 1986 the first batch of 8-4-4 students enrolled in secondary school and four years later, in November 1989, they took the first Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations (KCSE). This year also marked the end of the 7-4-3-2 system of education. In 1990, the first batch of students from the 8-4-4 system of education was admitted to university.

Education in Kenya is highly contested terrain. Major changes often precede a general election. This was the case with the current education system. Although the 8-4-4 system of education endeavoured to make education more accessible and relevant, it was politically

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4 The 8-4-4 system of education, introduced in 1986, remains the most significant restructuring made on education in post independent Kenya. Major changes were made to the years of schooling which now comprises eight years of primary, four of secondary and four of university. The curriculum is also more science and technology oriented.
instigated which helps to explain the haphazard implementation. The consequences are still pronounced in post primary education. In this study, I recognise that there is an inextricable link between technical, cultural and political factors and that they combine to determine the effectiveness of programmes and policies to improve the quality of education. The year 2005 was a significant year with respect to the World Declaration on Education For All (EFA). It was envisaged that gender parity in primary and secondary school would be attained.

Gender parity is concerned about equalness of numbers. It is for this reason a critical factor in education because it pays attention to the fact that education is not only the right of every child but a human right as well (UNESCO, 2000a:80). Under the 8-4-4 education system, significant progress has been made in terms of human rights to education and, in particular, female access to education both in primary and secondary education. However, school enrolment is only one aspect of education equity. Meaning that there is need to be critical and to look beyond numbers and into the nature of female participation in school. To this end, this study considers the quality schooling experiences, enrolment in schools subject, aspirations for higher education and careers to be critical considerations with respect to gender equity and the quality of equal education opportunities as envisaged under the broader vision of the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 2000a: 8; 19). The study explores the kinds of educational opportunities that have been created for girls under the 8-4-4 system. In this connection the section following establishes the state of gender and education under the 8-4-4 system. It also evaluates the changes that the 8-4-4 has brought with regard to the status of gender.

2.3 THE STATUS OF GENDER AND EDUCATION IN POST INDEPENDENT KENYA

It is worth noting that while the Ominde Commission recommended the establishment of girls’ boarding primary schools in sparsely populated areas (RoK, 1964:65) it failed to recommend similar interventions at other levels of education despite evidence of gender disparities.

Generally speaking, a legacy takes on from that which has been built as a foundation. Now, the Kenya’s first even commission on education considered gender equality an insignificant agenda item. Analysis of the make-up of the commission is revealing as to why this might
have been the case. Of the 37 member team, the commissioner, the secretariat, consultants, steering committees and panels were all male except a Mrs D'Souza in the Secretariat and a Mrs Habwe in the primary panel (RoK, 1964:3). How sensitive this commission might have been to the glaring gender inequalities in education then is anybody’s guess.

In all nine objectives for education cited in the report (RoK, 1965:25), there is little indication of education reform with regard to gender and education equality; instead the evidence is that of “gender blindness”. Gender blindness is the disregard of the differences that play in the social spheres because of gender roles and expectations (Sow, 1999:32).

Though the second objective hints at the need for gender equality: “education in Kenya must serve the people of Kenya and the needs of Kenya without discrimination” (RoK, 1964:25), the covert mention is unsatisfactory. For a country that had a wide array of inequalities in education a more explicit definition of ‘discrimination’ was necessary.

The eighth objective is also the same:
Education must promote social equality and remove divisions of race tribe and religion. It must pay especial attention to training in social obligation and responsibility (Republic of Kenya 1964:25).

Failure to qualify the notion of “social equality” in terms of gender discrimination renders it an invisible social phenomenon. In fact, I doubt that gender inequality is construed to be a social inequality. Although the objective is clear on the removal of all forms of discrimination (including gender discrimination), such removal is easily contradicted by the phrase “pay especial attention to training in social obligation and responsibility” (ibid.).

Although racial integration and national unity were paramount needs at independence, gender inequality in education was bad; yet the commission that established the values and principles for education in post independent Kenya gave no recognition to gender as a category of social discrimination. The context partly explains the lack of recognition. As has been mentioned earlier, in most Kenyan communities, the social structures are patriarchal and patrilineal. In most instances, the structures have remained unquestioned and unchallenged. These are the structures that shape the legislation and recommendations on education.
The Kenyan constitution in its current form condones sex discrimination even though it is in covert ways (Mucai-Kattambo, Kabeberi-Macharia and Kameri-Mbote, 1995:83). It does not recognise the autonomy of women first as citizen and then as women. For this reason, the status of women is subdued. They do not enjoy equal rights and autonomy to the level that men do with respect to land ownership and marriage rights (ibid.83). This unequal status is reinforced because gender is not entrenched in mainstream public policies.

Education policy is executed at three levels: the symbolic, the procedural and regulative (De Clercq, 1997). If gender is given no recognition at the symbolic leave – normally in the national constitution - then procedural and regulative policies become ineffective because there is no base, no significance attached to gender as a social concern. Legislation affirms significance which is why the findings and recommendations of education commissions of inquiry are so important.

2.3.1 THE TREATMENT OF GENDER IN KEY EDUCATION POLICIES

The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategy came out of the 1985 United Nations Conference on Women, which was held in Nairobi. This document was significant in that it came out of a United Nations conference held in sub Saharan-Africa. It is significant that the document frames education as pivotal to the improved status of women:

Education is the basis for the promotion and improvement of the status of women. It is the basic tool that should be given to women in order to fulfil their roles as full members of the society (UN, 1986).

The document was sensitive in its awareness and treatment of gender, particularly with respect to education as a means to the social development of women. However, it appears to have had little impact on education reform in Kenya especially with regard to ‘gender awareness’ in public policy.

Between 1963 and 1992, the government stand on gender within education was “gender blind” in eight out of fourteen public policy documents. A gender blind position is defined by Abagi (1995:41) as one where:

The policy statement completely ignores gender as a variable. There is less concern with gender per se, thus no mention of girls or boys, women or men. The focus is on either the general relevance of education or on the production of skilled ‘manpower’ – ‘education is important for the production skilled and high level manpower to meet the growing and the changing demands of the economy’, ‘the education system should aim at producing
individuals who are properly socialised and who possess necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes’.

Many of the documents on education policy were “not gender specific” meaning that the policy circumvented the mention of gender or any hint of it as a social inequality that disadvantages girls and women (see section 2.3 for recommendations by the Ominde Commission). According to Abagi (1995:41) in such policy documents:

The statements have no mention of male or female gender (no gender desegregation), but stipulate the commitments in general terms: ‘Government of Kenya is committed to increasing access and achieving UPE’; ‘parents are urged to send their children to school and retain them there’. From gender perspectives, the former statement is quite different from, for example, a gender sensitive sentence like; ‘parents are urged to send all their children regardless of sex (boys and girls) to school and retain them there’. It is a hard fact that girls and women are disproportionately under-represented in education. So any gender sensitive policy has to first realise this fact, then go ahead and stipulate how to specifically help both boys and girls.

By the beginning of the early seventies, public policy continued to create distinct worlds for male and female education. Gender was not of significant concern within the commissions set to reform education. The National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies which produced the Gachathi Report of 1976 revealed that the education objectives set out at independence had not been achieved as hoped (RoK, 1976). It noted that the demand for schools was much greater than the supply and even though there was expansion in education, the focus was on primary school education. At the secondary school level, female education was far less developed than male education (Otiende et al., 1992:107). The women in development approach (WID), which emerged in the seventies (see 3.3.1) is likely to have shaped the expansion of basic education as a consequence of the then powerful global discourses on women’s empowerment and emancipation. The WID approach managed to bring attention to the role of education in the social and economic development of women (see details in 3.2.1.1; 3.3.4).

Subsequent reports followed a similar trend. In the MacKay Report (RoK, 1981), produced by the Presidential Working Party on the Establishment of the Second Public University, gender remained a non-issue. It also held little significance for the Presidential Working Party on Education Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond, which produced Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988 on Education Manpower Training for the Next decade and Beyond (RoK, 1988), the blueprint for the 8-4-4 education system.
Ndunda-Kivula (2001:55-81) concedes that there has been a presumptive treatment of gender in Kenya. Nonetheless, she does point out that there has been change within the discourse from the late seventies. The change is in the private spheres. It emerged with the self-help initiatives that helped establish secondary schools and expand education opportunities in rural areas. Women were heavily involved in these self-help initiatives that built schools expanding educational opportunities for rural girls in particular.

Between 1963 and 1977, these self-help secondary schools, better known as Harambee schools, rose from 13.7% (13) of the total number of secondary schools in the country to 70% (1,048). By the mid eighties, the majority of those enrolled in the 1,466 Harambee secondary schools countrywide were female (Mwiria, 1986; 1990). Unfortunately, education standards in these schools were low, so employment and career prospects were equally low. As early as the mid seventies the job market was flooded with school leavers without adequate skills because of their Harambee school backgrounds (Otiende et al, 1992:92). The era of easier access to secondary schools emerged, but it came with a cost. Though numerous females managed to secure a secondary school certificate, the quality of education they received from these schools was inadequate for higher education. They flooded the job market but were uncompetitive because of their education background. As Sifuna (1990:168) rightly observed, “by the end of the first development decade, educational results though quantitatively impressive, were generally unsatisfactory”.

With the ‘educated’ unemployed, education had begun to fail in its contribution to national growth and development - a serious trend for a developing country that hoped to grow its own human capital. With these developments it was clear that education needed to change, and in 1972 a report released by the International Labour Organisation Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for increasing productive Employment in Kenya (ILO, 1972) recommended the restructuring of education to incorporate pre-vocational subjects right from primary school. It is out of these recommendations that the 8-4-4 education system was born.

Harambee schools are community schools in Kenya. They are a phenomenon of the seventies and eighties whereby local communities pooled resources and built secondary schools because the demand for secondary education was higher than the government could provide in government schools. Harambee schools were mainly established in rural areas. They were under-resourced with poorly qualified teachers and were often poorly managed. In later years many of them were absorbed by the government and supplied with qualified teachers.
2.3.2 THE STATUS OF GENDER UNDER THE 8-4-4 EDUCATION SYSTEM

Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988 on Education Manpower Training for the Next decade and Beyond, also known as the Kamunge Report is the ideological paper underpinning the 8-4-4 system of education aimed to prepare Kenyan youth with skills for self-reliance and self-employment (RoK, 1984; 1988).

As a whole, the 8-4-4 system of education envisages that “education must promote social justice” (RoK, 1988:7). Accessibility is one of the more visible structural changes intended to promote social justice. School leaving examinations between primary school and university were reduced from three to two in an attempt to flatten the pyramidal hierarchy that made accessibility to higher education difficult (RoK, 1984). Unfortunately, with respect to the more crucial issues of social justice, no recognition is made of the continued difficulties that are unique to females as far as access to education opportunities is concerned. The document is reported to make “no discussion on gender issues” (Ndunda-Kivula, 2001:80) and is largely also “gender blind” (Abagi, 1995:40).

In addition, the document ignores the question of female access to science and technical education, yet this is an aspect of education that should have been given critical consideration given that the 8-4-4 focuses on reform through science/technical education (RoK 1984; 1988). While this is stated with caution, the amendments to education under the 8-4-4 system can be described as simplistic, because no attention was paid to gender and in particular girls education, which leaves one wondering how social reform and industrialisation will be secured when the female population which has been marginalised in education is assumed to be at par with the male population simply because gender enrolment in school is on a record high.

Perhaps on the most salient features of the document is the cosmetic attempt to address the challenges of social inequality in education. The ‘ungrading’ of secondary schools is of particular intrigue, because of the way it is perceived as able to bring about change to gender imbalances and increase educational opportunities for girls.

Kenyan secondary schools have always been graded into four types, “A” being the highest quality schools and “D” the lowest (Keller, 1983:66). Under the 8-4-4 education system, this
categorisation has been abolished (RoK, 1998:82) even though physical setting, instructional materials and teachers still differentiate “A” from “D” type schools. The removal of categories is therefore superficial as the type school is evident from its physical structures and the organisational and social culture of school. With or without a label to them, there is an examination-based criterion that has to be met to access schools of the “A” and “B” type. The removal of ‘ordinary’ and ‘advanced’ level secondary education was a more meaningful change. It levelled secondary education because all Kenyans taking secondary education now access four years of schooling. There is only one exit level in secondary education by which some level of subject specialisation is attained because it is emphasised early (RoK, 1984:15). The greatest disadvantage with one exit level is the bottleneck in the race for higher education. The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination has in recent years become a certificate with little value.

The 8-4-4 system of education is claimed to be “a national education system that would always aim at removing social injustice and disparities” (RoK, 1988:7). Since it is “vocationally oriented and practical in its approach” (RoK, 1988:9), and endeavours to “develop skills for self-reliance, self-employment and to prepare school leavers for further education, training and employment” (RoK, 1988:15), it is assumed to be inclusive and carry the challenge of creating more opportunities and facilities in secondary education to enable girls to study technical subjects (RoK, 1988:15). Unfortunately, these aims are not explicit as would be expected. The third rationale for education states that “the 8-4-4 system will ensure that there are equal opportunities for all students regardless of their place, origin, creed or race …” (RoK, 1984:1). In this statement there is no mention of male or female and ‘gender’ is not given recognition as a category of social discrimination. Given that it is the objective of the 8-4-4 education system to “promote social justice and morality and social obligations and responsibilities”, this most recent education reform document fails to take cognisance of an important feature in education. Comparatively, there appears to be little difference in how gender is portrayed in this 8-4-4 education document and the first document on educational reform in Kenya – the Ominde Commission Report. In both instances, gender is portrayed as unimportant.

The Master Plan on Education and Training: 1997-2010 (RoK, 1998) is a more gender sensitive document. Education is portrayed as a tool for social development. This view is driven by the functionalist school of thought whereby schools are seen as serving to socialize
students to contribute to the economic, political and social institutions of that society (Feinberg and Soltis, 1992:6). Unlike previous policy documents, this document pays attention to gender. There is clear indication in the document that gender discrimination exists and in need of redress (RoK, 1998). All five objectives call for the promotion of social equity. It is the first policy document on education that makes an explicit link between gender equity and social justice. It highlights the importance of education for disadvantaged communities, poor households, girls and the handicapped (RoK, 1998:72).

While such recognition is very important, there are still outstanding questions. The question below is broad but it underpins the four questions that I raise in this study. Does a gender aware in policy make any difference to the status of girls’ education under the 8-4-4 system of education?

2.3.2.1 The state of girls’ education under the 8-4-4 system
Observations by Stromquist (1989:144) suggest that there are considerable obstacles that women in the Third World have to face in the course of their participation in education. Perhaps it is for such reasons that Bendera (1999:129) has persuasively argued that the “problems of educating girls have to be seen in the context of the wider social environment rather than in terms of the education system alone”. In the case of Kenya, historical developments in education have shown that education systems and policy structures have implications on girls’ education.

Table 2.1 below shows transition from primary to secondary school. It is low for both males and females. However, even with low transition to secondary school education, the gender gap is still wider at the primary school level. This is a curious feature that warrants critical examination of school enrolment statistics.
In 1989, among 15-19 year olds, only 22% (264,788) females and 30% (353,695) males in were enrolled in secondary school. In 1999 the figure was less for both females 18% (313,691) and males 20% (348,133). Two things emerge; first, that school enrolment figures only represent the population that is in school. Second, even though there is evidence of a closing gender gap, from 1989 to 2005, there are still more males than females in secondary school education nationally. The figures also show that the larger percentage of 15-19 year olds are not in secondary school even though the number of secondary schools is reported to have increased between 1989 and 1999 (Kenya, Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoES&T), 2002).

A plausible explanation to this trend is factored by gender. For the rural and urban population aged five and above that never attended school, the figure is higher among females than it is among males.

Generally, more females (47.1%) than males (42.7%) leave school and for those that have never attended school, males account for a lower percentage (14.1%) than females (21.9%) (RoK, 2001a). Although, there has been an increase in the percentage of males leaving school between 1989 and 1999, the percentage that does not attend school has remained more or less the same between the two population censuses RoK 2001a & b.). The problem of non-school attendance, low transition rates and school wastage is a ‘girl problem’. The problem follows girls into post-primary education.
Between 1970 and 1980, the number of female students enrolled at university level was generally low. In 1980/81, female enrolment was 20% (1,331) in University of Nairobi and 45% (925) in Kenyatta University. In 2000, two decades later, improvement was marginal. According to the *Economic Survey for 2001* women accounted for only 31.7% of the students enrolled in the six public universities (RoK, 2001d: 39-40). In Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology, the only public university offering science and technology in Kenya, female students were 21%. The trend was similar in middle level colleges. Female representation was low in all four national polytechnics (29.2%), technical training institutes (39.8%) and institutes of technology (43.0%). The pattern shows that female access higher education with difficulty whether it is university or college education. There is also indication that a practical and technical oriented education introduced under the 8-4-4 education system (RoK, 1988:17; 1984:5-8) does not guarantee easier access to secondary education, much less access to science and technical subjects. This unfortunate pattern has continued to perpetuate itself yet, there continues to be dire need for workers who are skilled in science and technology (Kinyanjui, 1978; RoK, 2004b).

The under representation women continues beyond higher education. Wage employment is an outcome of education that mirrors education quality. According to the *Economic Survey 2001* (RoK, 2001d), female participation in wage employment was only 29% in both 2000 and 1999. With the exception of social services, education services and domestic services where women were slightly over 35%, female employees in agriculture and forestry, mining, manufacturing, electrical and water works, building and construction, transport and communications, finance and business was less than 20%. The gender imbalance in wage employment suggests that females do not receive the kind of education that will place them in competitive jobs especially in science and technology.

Broadly speaking, the discussions so far show that gender disparities occur at every level of education in Kenya. The section following takes this discussion further. It identifies the local context of the study. In describing secondary school access in Central Province and Murang’a District, the section attempts to demonstrate the shortcomings of formal equality and puts a case for research on issues of substantive equality in education.
2.3.2.1.1 **Beyond parity: Making a case for substantive equality**

Central Province has 533 secondary schools: 501 public and 32 private secondary schools. Of the public schools, there are 6 national, 62 provincial and 433 district schools (MoES&T, 2002). In 1999, there were 515,545 boys and girls aged 14 to 17, the school going age for secondary school (259,856 boys and 255,689 girls). Of the total 166,535 enrolled in secondary school 77,991 were boys and 88,544 girls (ibid.).

The increase in secondary school enrolment is attributable to a government initiated “take over” of thriving Harambee schools in the eighties (Keller, 1983:58). The move improved the financial status of Harambee schools. They began to receive government grants and qualified teachers with the government paying their salaries.

There is no denying that self-help initiatives made secondary education more accessible in Kenya. However, the “take over” did not alter secondary education in terms of differences between schools. A case in point is girls’ education. Even though girls’ take the lead in school enrolment, the majority are in schools of poor quality. According to Kinyanjui (1978) the type of school that one attends ultimately affects the quality and type of curriculum that are offered and generally in Kenya girls attend what were previously referred to as government assisted and unaided schools (ibid.) and these are Harambee schools. Fort Hall and Dominican are former Harambee schools (see 6.2.1 and 7.2.1) and one assumes that the change in status and the value that comes with it influences girls’ experiences of secondary education in positive and fruitful ways.

Within Murang’a district, which has the biggest percentage of schools established on a Harambee basis, there are 87 such secondary schools of which 69 are mixed sex schools, 7 are boys’ and 11 girls’ schools. The total number of students enrolled in these secondary schools in 2001 was 19,422 of whom 8,591 were male and 10,831 female (Kenya, Murang’a District Education Office, 2001a). Like the rest of the province, Murang’a district has more girls than boys enrolled in secondary schools. Mixed sex schools account for 65.5% of the students. Most co-education schools in Kenya were originally Harambee schools. Harambee schools are associated with easy access to secondary education but at the same time they are also known for providing poor quality education and poor academic performance in public examinations. Although they do not exist as a category following the ‘ungrading’ of
secondary schools in Kenya, *Harambee* schools are accessible to anyone who cares to pursue a secondary school education. As the statistics show, females have fewer chances with post primary education and girls enrol in these schools. Such are the contradictions that come with the growth and expansion of schooling.

Teachers’ gender is another factor of importance in girls’ education because they have multiple roles. Of the total number of teachers in Murang’a district, 90% are highly qualified and hold either a university degree or a teaching diploma (Murang’a District Education Office, 2000d and 2001a). The percentage of male teachers is higher (62.45%) to that of female teachers (37.5%).

The statistical evidence above suggests that education opportunities are open for females in the same ways they are for males. One could argue that the equality of educational opportunity prevails in Murang’a district.

The equality of educational opportunity is associated with accessible education where “gender equity is perceived as access to education, so that criteria for gender equity are fulfilled by parity in enrolment” (Stromquist, 1999:25). Parity in enrolment is an important feature of improved education quality; however, its achievement does not necessarily mean that education is equitable. The question then is; when then does education become equitable?

Aikman and Unterhalter (2005:2) commend the many countries that have or are progressively closing the gender gap in education but go on to argue that under that “rather narrow aspiration” the “more challenging dimension of gender equality and equity are often not considered, analysed and monitored”.

In similar vein o Aikman and Unterhalter (2005:2), Stromquist (1999) lays out a critical theoretical perspective which serves as a foundation for the examination of gender equity in education where educational issues require to be taken beyond school access and school enrolment. The perspective recognises that education is a complex phenomenon because of the power relations that exist in the interfaces between school, household, community and state. It also recognises that even though males and females might attend school and survive an education cycle in equal numbers, they do so from different positions of advantage. It recognises that the constraints that go with schooling are also experienced differently which
illustrates that there are limitations with formal equality. Similar to Stromquist (1999), Subrahmanian (2003:2) in her UNESCO working document *Gender Equality in Education: Definitions and Measurements*, advances a new way of examining gender equality which pays attention to the importance of substantive equality in the framing of gender issues in education.

Subrahmanian describes gender parity as “a quantitative or numerical concept … the equal participation of boys and girls in different aspects of education” (ibid., 2003:2). However, unlike the early thinking on gender equality in developing countries (see Schiefelbein and Farrell, 1980), recent thinking takes the issue beyond numbers. Subrahmanian has argued that gender equality is a process of “ensuring educational equality between boys and girls” (ibid.).

According to Subrahmanian (2003), substantive equality recognises “the ways in which women are different from men, in terms of their biological capacities and in terms of the socially constructed disadvantages women face relative to men.” He argues that the attainment of substantive equality depends on two further processes:

… indicators of which can tell us how equality of outcome has been achieved. These processes refer to the quality of experience of education, in terms of entering education, participating in it and benefiting from it. For gender equality to be meaningful, mechanisms for ensuring equality of treatment as well as equality of opportunity for men and women are important. These in turn rest on a commitment to non-discrimination, to ensure the erasure of social norms that construct women and men as unequal in value in terms of their contributions and entitlements, and to ensure that all social actors are committed to eliminating stereotypes and attitudes that reinforce and perpetuate inequalities in the distribution of resources between women and men. Assessing gender equality thus requires assessing whether fundamental freedoms and choices are as equally available to women as they are to men. This involves focusing on pathways to equality, extending the concern with treatment and opportunity to also focusing on agency and autonomy exercised by women in enjoying their freedoms.

Substantive equality considers education in totality. For Unterhalter (2005:29) totality means using a combination of approaches to interrogate equality. The key features of interrogation might include securing conditions for social justice, a focus on disempowering structures and an emphasis on identities.
In the context of Murang’a district, this means interrogating gender beyond the depictions of formal equality. Such a move is important given that the ‘educational playing field’ is not level even though formal equality may portray it as such.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The chapter discusses girls’ education in a very specific context. It describes and analyses the trends and patterns in education development in colonial and postcolonial eras in Kenya. It highlights the significance of gender within education. Using Central Province and Murang’a district as the specific focus of the study, the chapter brings out the importance of gender parity but at the same time argues the need for research on girls’ education to look beyond school access and into the more substantive issues of education equity.

The Ministry of Education recommends research that can establish students, parental and community preferences as a means to understanding future trends in secondary education (RoK 1998:89). By focusing on secondary education rather than primary education this study addresses gender equity issues at a level of education that has been ignored in Kenya. The focus on secondary education continues to be gender access and survival yet education outcomes at the secondary level of education are especially important for females because of the place and role of women in the labour market.

Finally, by the end of secondary school, a girl who has not repeated any class, is aged seventeen and will have received 12 years of formal schooling. Since there are more benefits accrued with the number of years women attend school, then it does make sense to incisively examine what ought to be commensurate with secondary education in terms of quality. The next chapter lays out the theoretical framing used to interrogate and analyse gender and education equity girls’ education in Murang’a district. The frame borrows from feminist and women’s development literature.

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6 Most studies define equality as “equal educational opportunity” – a notion that argues that everyone should be given the opportunity to receive an education, but that makes no reference to the process nor to the outcome of such an event. A few studies consider that access to facilities and services is not enough and that equality should also mean the likelihood of completing a given educational cycle. Even fewer studies hold that equality is reached when individuals obtain similar levels of knowledge and select occupations that are evenly distributed. From a feminist perspective, it matters very much that equality occur at each of the four levels contemplated by Schiefelbein and Farrell. Educational access without completion, completion without learning and learning without social recognition does little to ensure improved conditions for women in society (Stromquist 1989:144).
CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminism is not a misnomer of empowerment; it is survival, life and death.
Every woman must embrace it to live!

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter lays the theoretical foundation that frames the investigation into girls’ experiences of schooling, their preferences and choices of school subjects, career and higher education aspirations. It provides the lenses for the collection, analysis, interrogation and discussion of data.

Education is important to economic development because it creates the skills that are used to grow and develop the national economy hence section 3.2 considers the link between education and economic development. By broadly examining perspectives on education and development, it deliberates the influence of various economic development perspectives in the framing of education in Kenya. Section 3.3 considers the role of education in women’s development. Three approaches that are used to advance the social and economic development of women are examined: women in development (WID), women and development (WAD), gender and development (GAD). In section 3.4 WID, WAD and GAD are discussed in the light of gender, equality and education. Section 3.5 examines single-sex girls’ education within the broad context of gender equity and the development of women and in the conclusion of the chapter (section 3.6), I press forward Weiner’s (1985:7) argument that there is need to include critical and praxis-oriented dimensions in the study of gender and education.

3.2 EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Dakar in 2000 reaffirmed that good quality education is essential for supporting economic development, addressing poverty, equipping learners with requisite skills and knowledge, supporting people to transform their lives and the society they live in, and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. All of these objectives are linked to the well-being and empowerment of women especially in developing nations. Given this link between education and development and the fact that
women are key role players in the development of a nation, it becomes important to review why education has become so important for women as a social group.

In 1948, the United Nations listed education as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations (UN), 1948). The central place of education in society was also given official recognition in article 26 which stipulates that:

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

The UNESCO Education Plan for Africa, which came out of a conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in May 1961, encapsulated the right to education for countries in the African region at a time when mass was to become important for political independence to have meaningful social and economic gains. The conference declared it time to invest in the education of women, which was significant because it came at a time when the condition of female education in continent was deplorable (see details in Chapter 2). A decision was reached at this meeting to achieve universal primary education by 1980.

Though timely, this achievement was going to be a challenge because many newly independent governments inherited education systems characterised by wide imbalances, particularly of gender. Like many other newly independent African countries then, the focus in Kenya was on basic education. While there is not doubt that basic education is important in terms of foundational skills, the focus placed on it since independence served to undermine other educational needs that were specific to gender and in particular the education of girls and women (see 2.3; 2.2.3 for details on Kenya). Gender inequalities abound in many countries in the world but nearly 60 million of the world’s out-of-school children of primary school age are from sub-Saharan-Africa, two-thirds are girls and education access, retention and completion continue to be major problems plaguing education at all levels (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2003:23). Ironically, it is
mainly in sub-Saharan Africa where, since the sixties, there has been concerted global efforts to make basic education available to all.

For these reasons, the priority of the national government in Kenya continues to be primary education primarily because of global pressure to meet the target goals of universal primary education by 2005 (UNESCO, 2002; 2004 and RoK, 1998). Ironically and despite the focus, the education needs that are specific to women are far from being met and the gender gap is still very wide in secondary and higher education (UNESCO, 2002; 2004). Gender inequalities in education are a major challenge to the social and economic development of a country because the lack of education or poor quality education keeps women out of economy engagements that are well remunerated (UNESCO, 2000a; Colclough et al., 2003).

The economy has structures and hierarchies, which shape educational expectations and opportunities. Trends in Kenya’s education in the last forty years demonstrate how priorities have shifted in the attempt to meet the needs for economic development. These trends show that a symbiotic relationship exists between education and economic development. It is a relationship where education policy is shaped around a country’s need for social and economic development.

In the colonial era, colonial African education equipped Africans with the basic skills needed for the establishment of an agricultural based economy (see 2.2.1.2). Because of this, there was a deficit of skills and manpower at independence. A new ‘home-grown’ skilled manpower was required to replace the old colonial manpower but this required that the new government be sensitive not only to racial integration but to the creation of an education system that would develop a diversity of skills and leadership. This necessitated the expansion of secondary and tertiary education (see 2.2.2), which at the time was dominantly male in terms of enrolment.

Though much has changed in education in the last forty years, many of the changes are related to school access. But as already mentioned in Chapter 2 the case is not the same with female other aspects of schooling other than increased female enrolment in schools (see section 2.3.2.1 for facts behind the figures). Female representation in science and technology and waged employment is low. Yet, the two areas are critical to balanced economic development. In both areas, women continue to be marginalised. While this condition can be attributed to
many things, for the purposes of this thesis, I focus on the contribution that education has made towards female invisibility.

The participation of women in wage employment has risen in the last forty years, but the rise has been gradual from 12.2% in 1964 to 21% in 1990 to 29% in 2000 (RoK, 2000a; 2001d). The representation indicates that waged employment, which is a modern sector of the Kenyan economy, is yet to open its doors to women. Women constitute the majority (52% according to the 1999 population census) of the Kenyan population (RoK, 2001a) so it is imperative that they are represented proportionately in this sector because waged employment is linkable to social and economic development in general invariably the condition of women. There are also social benefits linked to the employment of women, which justifies investment in female education.

Education makes a valuable contribution to and increases economic productivity and ultimately economic development. Some of the social benefits associated with education include increased political participation, improved health, delayed marriage, lower fertility and planned investment in the next generation (Schultz, 1989a; King and Hill, 1993). These social payoffs are pertinent to quality livelihood, which is why there is support and justification for them in the recently introduced millennium development goals (MDGs). The third MDG argues for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It focuses on education as a tool of empowerment and envisages that with educated women there is a strong possibility of sharply reducing the incidence of poverty by 2015 (UNESCO, 2003:27).

Like most national chapters, the Kenyan national chapter on Education For All (EFA) endorses the Dakar Framework for Action (RoK, 1998:58-77). Within the six target goals, two aim at achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and gender equality by 2015. The objectives of the third millennium development goal in embraced in these targets.

By way of introduction, I foreground global development agendas and draw a link between the education of women, social and economic development. While I stand in agreement with education economists that the benefits to female education have national implications I am at the same time wary of the fact these agendas are conceived within a global context yet their
success is bound up by national contexts that varies from country to country and region to region. In this connection, it becomes imperative to point out that criticism of the six EFA target goals and the eight MDGs, is not the intention of this study. However, it is important to take cognisance of the fact that they are the focal point of national education agendas and critical eyes are essential when it comes to looking into how targets and goals can be achieved.

Like all countries that are signatories to the Jomtein Declaration on Education for All gender parity in primary and secondary education must be achieved by 2005 and gender equality in education by 2015. This is the case with Kenya where education is enmeshed in a social culture that is all of the following things: traditional, gendered, hierarchal and transitory and an economy, that is yet to become stable and yielding. For the political climate, it is at best verbally supportive and at worst defective because of the lack of funds to implement education projects and the lack of political will to effect changes in policy. Given this scenario, one has to ask how education equity can be achieved within such an environment. The point that I am making here is that the context of education matters because the shape that education takes and the change that needs to occur consciously or unconsciously heed to the dynamics of a context. I find it necessary at this point to consider why education is linked to economic development (economic development also includes social development) and how the education discourse is shaped by the needs perceived as necessary for economic development.

3.2.1 EDUCATION THROUGH AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

It is not the objective of sub section to deliberate what approach is best suited for education to meet the needs of economic development. Rather, I ride on the viewpoints of others primarily to facilitate arguments on why and how various perspectives to economic development shape education polices and agendas.

The classical economics perspective on development is generally associated with capitalism and modernisation. In strictly classical economics, the term development denotes the capacity of a national economy to generate and sustain an annual increase in its gross national product at rates of 5% to 7% (Todaro, 1997:13). The primary concern of classical economics is the generation of wealth. This means that when the mainspring of growth and development
increases there is an increase in the quantity and quality of all kinds of resources (Thirlwall, 1999:4). Ultimately when economic growth is optimum, Gross National Product (GNP) per capita is also high, this means that a country has wealth. GNP places countries into distinct categories, either as developed or underdeveloped, depending on how high or low the GNP is (Lynn, 2003). Countries with a high GNP per capita are able to service public sectors like education. The challenges of education inequality tend to be less because education is well resourced. Few countries in sub-Saharan Africa have a healthy GNP per capita; it explains why the achievement of EFA target goals and the MDGs is a challenge.

Classical economics is linked to education because education is imperative to the process of modernisation, which in turn drives the creation of wealth.

The modernisation theory is a classical perspective that thrived in the 1940s. It is associated with Walt Rostow (1960) and based on the historical model of western industrial societies. Modernisation theory postulates for changes in economic trends through gradual stages. It is a process that requires capital formation; that is, investment in large-scale infrastructure such as roads and factories, technology transfer and foreign aid loans. These are also the benchmarks of development, which lead to industrialisation and a high GNP per capita. In today’s macroeconomics, the neoclassical approach is favoured because of private investment and market efficiency (Lynn, 2003 and Todaro, 1997). It “assumes economic ‘rationality’ and a purely materialistic, individualistic, self-interested orientation towards economic decision making” (Todaro, 1997:7). It is a model that targets advanced capitalistic world markets. In advanced capitalistic world markets like the United States, the benefit of the neoclassical approach is that the government is able to generate money from tax where public assets are privatised. The conspicuous presence of multinational corporations in public education in the United States through bursaries, curriculum materials and co-curriculum activities like sports (Korten, 1995:154-155) is telling of how government autonomy can be reduced simply because of the investment corporations put into the sector (Carnoy, 1993). Though there is plenty of money for education, autonomy is threatened and the prospects of having a deregulated education sector are real. The neoclassical approach is the same one that underpins IMF and World Bank programmes in developing countries.
3.2.1.1 Education in Kenya through the lens of economic development

The value of education to economic development is undisputable; however, the quality of education that a nation is able to offer corresponds to its economic condition. In this regard, it is important to locate education in Kenya within its political economy, which is very different from that in the United States. The education of women in sub-Saharan Africa is about increasing life-chances (Egbo, 2000), this link makes it important to review education through the lenses of socio-economic development.

Within sub-Saharan Kenya is a middle-income country (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2003; 2004). However, its GNP per capita income of US$ 1,129 in 2000 and US$ 1,052 in 2003 (RoK, 2000a; 2001c) cannot support its education budget even though the country is considered as able to service the education sector. Unlike Africa’s economic giant South Africa, whose GNP for 2000 and 2001 was US$ 2,131 and US$ 2,763 respectively, the Kenyan economy is weak because it depends primarily on agriculture a sector that has become unreliable. The result is poor returns and strain to the bad fiscal situation.

Fiscal strain is an economic situation that characterises all developing countries where there is rapid expansion in service sectors like education (Perkins et al., 2001:325). Education has always taken the lion’s share of the national budget since Kenya’s independence, however, it has become burdensome as it now takes up more than one-third of the annual government budget (RoK, 2003). The strain notwithstanding, the Kenyan government has upheld that education is indispensable to social economic development (RoK 1964; 1965; 1976; 1988; 1998; 1999; Prewitt, 1974), hence the reason why it has continued to invest so heavily in education. In recent years, however, the government has been forced to seek donor funding because of the commitments that the nation has made to providing education to all as stipulated in the Jomtein Declaration of 1990.

In addition, Kenya has ratified the World Declaration on Education for All, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and there have been high monetary implications on this decision. At least 60% of the education budget goes to primary education, 15% to secondary and 22% to university. Since the introduction of free primary education in 2002, expenditure on primary education rose from Ksh 892.18 million in

It is understandable that universal primary education (UPE) is critical to economic development, which is why its achievement is targeted for 2015 (UNESCO, 2000b:8). However, when the largest percentage of the education budget goes into primary education there is less money going into secondary and tertiary education yet these are critical to the ‘economic take off’ of developing countries. In the 2002/03 and 2003/04 fiscal years only 52.19 and 150.00 million shillings was spent on secondary education respectively (RoK, 2003).

Another challenge to the growth, expansion and provision of quality secondary education is that most government financing in education goes to recurrent expenditure, mainly to meet teachers’ salaries and allowances (Karani, 1995; RoK 2000a; 20001c). There is little money left for development expenditure so physical and instructional facilities in schools have become a responsibility that the government has relegated to parents. The cost-sharing policies introduced into service sectors in the eighties bear testimony to this. Today, the cost of secondary education has almost entirely been transferred to parents (Gikandi and Mureu, 2006). As more government subsidies go to free primary education, secondary education is increasingly getting out of the reach of the majority of Kenyan children. This explains why transition from primary to secondary to tertiary education is distinctly pyramidal (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2).

The provision of physical and instructional facilities in secondary schools in Kenya largely depends on what parents can afford, so in addition this cost has impact on the resources a school has and invariably the quality of education it can afford to give. This link is often not interrogated yet is has implications on the quality of education output and outcomes which for Kenya is industrialisation. According to the Master Plan on Education and Training: 1997-2010 (RoK, 1998:68), for Kenya to realise the newly industrialised status by 2020, it needs to expand secondary education because it is the gateway to further training and employment. Secondary education is the foundation of the scientific and technological advancement that Africa needs to develop industrialised economies (Ndoye, 2003) yet recent country reports state that the quality of academic output and in particular the quality of science and technology education is poor at the secondary level (UNESCO, 2002; 2004).
Having said that, it is also important to explore why investment in education is skewed towards primary education yet it is secondary education that has been identified as Kenya’s hope for future scientific and technologic economic development.

According to Cornwell (2000:162), the classical theorists perceive that it is possible to invest in people in the same way that one would modernise an economy through investment in infrastructure such as roads, buildings and factories. Typical human capital thinking assumes that “education transforms the raw human capital of human beings into productive ‘human capital’ by inculcating … skills” (Tilak cited in Cornwell, 2000:162). This is the position that the World Bank takes with regard to development in the Third World. By investing in basic education it is assumed that the social and economic conditions of the masses in sub-Saharan-Africa can be improved, leading to the alleviation of poverty and ultimately an improvement to the social and economic well-being of individuals and the country as a whole (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985:287-288). This is the same assumption used by Western liberal feminists to inform conventional development frameworks that target the empowerment of women (see section 3.2.1.1).

The modernisation of the Kenyan economy as envisaged by the 8-4-4 system should result in the creation of a human resource base that will generate wealth that will in turn create higher standards of living and improved quality of life (RoK, 1998:29). However, for a fragile developing agrarian based economy, like the Kenyan one, it is important to take cognisance of the fact that the modernisation through the means of education does not occur in a vacuum. The social and economic realities are different from those in developed countries. They are realities that pose limitations on how education can foster development especially because such economies are not self-directed. This is exactly the point that Mehmet (1999:5) advances when she argues that:

The gulf between idealized market theory of mainstream economics and the practice of economic development is still with us because economic development theories have been Western, made in the West and based on experience far removed from Third World realities. In a word, and with one important exception, these theories lacked the fit essential for social and cultural soundness.

It is my contention that the normative foundations on which education for development are built is presumptive. The fact that modernisation theories are not working in Kenya in the same way they do in the West warrants questions and an exploration of the alternative ways
of thinking about social economic development. It is for these reasons useful to examine the shortcomings that are linked to classical economics and its driving force, modernisation theory, even though it is not the intention of this study to debate the details and intricacies.

The worst critics of modernisation theory are development economists. Development economists argue is that modernisation theory has a top-down approach to development that fails to consider other factors that influence the development process itself and more importantly the ways that various social groups become involved in the process of modernising. Brydon and Chant (1988:7) have described how insensitive this perspective is to gender inclusivity and in particular how it marginalises women:

Women are either assumed to be attached to men, or are ignored altogether; that is they are not analysed as a social group in their own right. Those who suggest that women’s status improves with economic development, frequently fail to take into account the widespread structures of patriarchy, which keep women in subordinate positions.

Because classical economics is top-down and it uses a traditional measure of wealth and well-being it tends to ignore the context, which according to Mahmoud (1991:141) is the most important prerequisite for real development. Developing countries like Kenya are riddled with complex social, cultural and political issues so even when the country records economic growth one needs to be critical of the nature of growth in terms of social and economic transformation because it is here that the real issues affecting peoples’ lives lie.

Various attributions to the underdevelopment of the Third World have been linked to classical economics. The Marxist historiographic perspective posits that the economic exploitation of developing countries is essentially the product of an imperialist and colonialist framed capitalism (Rodney, 1972). The worst criticisms are those that view classical economics and its driving force modernisation theory as unsuitable to developing economies. Development economists have argued that developing countries regress into a source of raw materials for developed nations creating a world economy that is divided into a ‘core’ and a ‘periphery’ (Balasubramanyam and Lall, 1991; Rodney, 1972; Frank, 1969). Structural economics theorists with their neo-colonial dependency theory, which is an outgrowth of Marxist thinking that emerged in the 1960s (Lynn, 2003:48; Todaro, 1997:82), add that because of unequal relationships, dependency is inevitable. The ‘lesser’ partner duplicates foreign models, mostly European, to boost weak economies and the result is dependency and depletion of resources, which more than anything else affects social sectors that touch on the
well-being and livelihood of women (Elson, 1989; 1999; Gordon, 1996a; Scott, 1995). When this occurs a country becomes dependent on donor money. Sectors that require huge budgets like education suffer because the money is directed to areas of donor interest. In the case of Kenya, it is free primary education.

Dependency creates poverty. Dependency has also been linked to the underdevelopment of women (Scott, 1995) and in countries like Kenya where stringent economic reforms are in place, the situation becomes worse because sectors offering social services become affected by financial cut backs. There are no easy answers for this but Kenya’s unstable political and economic history in the 1980s illustrates this point and Barkan (1994:1) offers a plausible explanation. He argues that economic reform and political reform are partners. In other words, the road to modernisation is complex because national contexts are the playground of global economic policies. The impact or perhaps even interference of structural adjustment programmes on national economies illustrates this point further.

Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) are economic recovery strategies designed to bolster economic development. SAPs are characterised by privatisation and liberalisation policies. As a developing economy and a Third World country dependent on donor funding, Kenya is obliged to adhere to SAPs and other conditions mandated by the IMF and the World Bank (Onimode, 1989; 1990). For Kenya, the unstable political and economic climate has led to negative rather than positive impact.

Fiscal cutbacks are characteristic of SAPs. Following the introduction of user fees in social service sectors like education, health and agriculture, SAPs have severely undermined the welfare of the people. These sectors became inaccessible and hurt the poor (ibid.). The resultant effects become evident in deepened poverty, which is characterised by malnutrition, school wastage, closure of schools and hospitals and the recurrence of previously eradicated disease (Afshar and Dennis, 1992; Gladwin, 1991). In addition, the brunt of these economic changes deeply affects women as a group (Elson, 1989; Vickers, 1991; Kinyanjui, 1994).

At the national front, rather than creating thriving economies, these economic recovery programmes have irreversibly changed the socio-economic face of most developing economies creating dependency (Onimode, 1989; Anyoku, 1990), what Gordon (1996a:135) describes as “dependent peripheral development”.

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Like Walter Rodney (1972), Gordon (1996a) concedes that dependency emanates from economic exploitation and traces Africa’s retarded development to colonialism. Her argument makes a link between economic exploitation and women’s disenfranchisement. She goes further and examines history, from which she attributes women’s disenfranchisement to a masculine hegemony with roots in pre-colonial pre-capitalist Africa (see 2.2.1.1 and 2.2.1.2). She concludes that the continued underdevelopment of women is dictated by an underdeveloped capitalism, Western and African patriarchy. For her, women’s development is lodged in historicity for which detailed accounts are made in Chapter 2.

Even though there are other indices to the dynamics of development for the purposes of this study, development has been discussed from a classical economics perspective as most African countries have economies that are shaped by capitalist-oriented reforms and strategies. These reforms and strategies intersect agriculture, health and education also the sectors that make up women’s worlds. It is for this reason that this study found it difficult to de-link economic development from a study that examines the education of women, specifically girls.

In the remaining part of this section, I examine what development economics use to foreground the social, economic and political arena in which women’s development takes place. I also discuss WID, WAD and GAD, feminism theory and single-sex girls’ education.

It is argued that there is “no divorce between theory and the observed facts” (Thirlwall 1999:4), but as far as development is concerned, the reality and challenge of development is very different from that of theory. Development economics is a distinct field within economics that broadens and deepens understanding of what is required for socio-economic development; it is said to be an alternative to classical and neoclassical perspectives (Todaro, 1997:14 and Thirlwall, 1999:3). In Africa, arguments by Ominode (1990) and Himmelstrand, Kinyanjui and Mburugu (1994) conclude that sustainable economic growth, human development, environmental protection, institutional transformation, gender equity and human rights protection constitute key factors that differentiate between development and traditional economic theory like modernisation theory. In this regard, the dilemmas of illiteracy, hunger, poverty and ill health must be approached from the perspective of human development.
According to Charlton (1984:7), “‘development’ implies a notion of historical change from Western European secular and scientific thought”. It is a notion that is associated with a process towards development in developing countries. Women’s development is inescapably linked to the historical processes linked to the development of developing countries. While there are global trends there are also individual and collective national histories which development economics is cognisant of. Charlton (1984:9-31) identifies four factors that are enduring about this humanised perspective to development processes:

- ethical choice;
- the international system, in particular the hierarchy of nation states, the Third World and new international units;
- Western influence, namely colonialism and imperialism, dependency, organisation, culture and communication;
- political dependency of women with regard to personal and political dependency, the private and the public spheres.

If socio-economic development processes are given shape by these factors then education is not exempt particularly if the understanding of how women’s inferior condition in society emerges is required. According to Stromquist (1998), there is need to unpack these factors for the analysis of the constraints on schooling emanating from gender to be reliable.

3.3 THE FRAMING OF WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT

This section begins with historical examination of modern feminism and then goes on to highlight its roots in liberal feminism. It deliberates developments within feminism and links them to WID, WAD and GAD and eventually to gender and education.

The first six of the eight MDGs draw attention to social concerns that are endemic to the sub-Saharan African region (UNDP, 2003). The six include the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; the attainment of universal primary education; the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women; the reduction in child mortality; improved maternal health; and the combating of HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases and are all related to socio-economic development and the social concerns that exacerbate the condition of women. It is in the light of this relationship that WID (women in development), WAD (women and
development) and GAD (gender and development) approaches have theoretical relevance to matters of economic development.

All development projects are, according to Rathgeber (1990:489) situated within specific theoretical frameworks. WID, WAD and GAD are no exception; they are contemporary perspectives on gender and development that have evolved out of feminist discourses. As development initiatives intended to lead women to gain power over their lives and operations within the political economy, WID, WAD and GAD give due consideration to where women are coming from with respect to their disadvantaged social status and the need for empowerment and emancipation (see Visvanathan, Duggan, Nisonoff and Wiegermsa, 1997; Moser, 1993; Joekes, 1987; Hay and Stichter, 1984; Charlton, 1984).

WID takes a modernisation perspective that translates women’s development through the lens of liberal feminism. WID is conceptually linked to the equality and equity discourses and emancipation agendas that questioned women’s oppression in the sixties and seventies (Moser, 1993). WAD and GAD bear a similar praxis agenda. However, because they are rooted in socialist feminism, namely neo-Marxist feminism (Rathgeber, 1990:490-493), they attend to the social questions affecting women from different theoretical standpoints. Each approach carries different meanings and assumptions about the status of women and the role that gender plays in shaping that status (Campbell-Rowan, 1999; Visvanathan et al., 1997:17-25). Unlike the other two, GAD takes a more critical stance on the situation of women because it recognises that gender inequalities emanate from social and power relations aligned to gender. Theoretically, the GAD approach combines a radical/ Marxist and a socialist stance. It takes cognisance of the fact that the construction of gender roles and relations is integral to the understanding of women and their development (Gordon, 1996a; Rathgeber, 1990). These standpoints frame the different ways from which women’s development needs are constructed. They are significant in the framing of gender, equality and education.

3.3.1 WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Like most social theory, feminism has its origins in the Age of Enlightenment (also known as Age of Reason). Europe in the 18th and 19th century in was a time of societal transitions including the quest for equality (LeGates, 2001). It was a period that “fostered an array of political and social and intellectual movements, most of them characterised by an explicit
faith in the capacity of human reason to generate social reform” (Andersen, 2000:327). The liberal philosophy has dominated most thinking around social equality in Western societies. Liberal philosophy goes with the thinking that “the best society is one in which no group receives special treatment based on its race, colour, religion, national origin or gender ... it [liberal philosophy] is the very foundation for modern civil rights legislation” (Andersen, 2000:326). Like most social reform, modern feminism is also linked to liberalism. Modern feminism is a school of political thought that underscores equal rights and equality between men and women in all spheres of life (Tong, 1989).

Historically, liberal feminism can be linked to three European theorists: Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Harriet Taylor Mill (1802-1876) (Spender, 1983). Mary Wollstonecraft’s personal proclamations of the ideals of equal rights and civil liberty are the earliest writings on liberal feminist thought. Her essay A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, published in 1792, bears the philosophical foundation of modern feminism (ibid.). Her writings helped to advance feminist thinking throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th century (Laslett and Thorne, 1997; Rendall, 1985; Spender, 1983). Her writings were responsible for influential first wave (also known as the suffrage movement) and second wave feminism, out of which the tenets of liberal feminism came into public sphere (LeGates, 2001; Offen, 2000; Rendall, 1985; Spender, 1982).

Liberal feminism is a social critical theoretical standpoint used both to deliberate equity issues and to effect relevant policies; its ideals and concerns extend from legal and political rights, to education and employment opportunities and to women’s rights (Tong, 1989). It is associated with the WID framework, which has dominated gender equity discourse, influenced research, policymaking and even the thinking of international agencies working in developing countries (Rathgeber, 1990:489).

The acronym ‘WID’ denotes ‘women in development’. It was coined in the seventies by women development professionals sitting on the Women’s Committee of the Washington, DC, Chapter of the Society for International Development (Rathgeber, 1990: 490):

‘women in development’ has become common currency both inside and outside academic settings … WID is understood to mean the integration of women into global processes of economic, political and social growth and change” (ibid., 1990:489).
WID is a conventional approach to women’s development that concedes to a liberal philosophy and conceives the equality of all women as a feasible goal (Visvanathan et al., 1997; Moser, 1993; Rathgeber, 1990). It operates on the premise that women have been left out of development processes. It undertakes to empower women socially and economically through a welfare, equity, antipoverty and efficiency approach (Moser, 1989:1808). The WID approach views education as a means to empowerment. In education, WID advocates for gender-oriented policy anchored in liberal feminist ideals, human capital development for modernisation of societies. The assumption is that that education and schooling lead to economic progress (Stromquist, 2001; Scott, 1995).

Before the mid seventies, development studies paid little attention to the role that women made to economic development (Fink, 1992: 173). Ester Boserup’s seminal work *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (Boserup, 1970) is therefore Historical as far as documenting the social development of African women.

Boserup’s thesis came at a time when aid-based strategies were being used to help poor and rich nations bridge the wealth gap without success (Rostow, 1960). Many African countries were in their first decade of independence creating a new national identity and developing structures for socio-economic development, in particular education (see Chapter 2). Boserup argued that women were being marginalised through the feminisation and subsequent devaluation of subsistence farming because of the advent of technology based on cash crop farming (Boserup, 1970). The study highlighted that development theories underestimated the role of women in economic production, which launched significant international debate. Boserup’s analysis of economic data from various countries of the Third World opened up, for the first time, the human dimension to gender and development, and illuminated the multiple faces of economic production. It came at a time of economic crisis, increasing debt and critical questions about the ‘modernising’ Western models for economic development (Visvanathan et al., 1997). It also came at a time when the United Nations Development Decade (1961-1970) demonstrated failure to create wealth in developing nations (Nierfen cited in Visvanathan et al., 1997). It raised a myriad of issues with regard to policies on women’s development, strategies and projects in the Third World countries (see among others Scott, 1995; Gordon, 1996a; Brydon and Chant, 1988; Staudt and Jacquette, 1983; Benería and Gita, 1997). Boserup’s work signalled an upsurge of unending feminist debates leading
to the “start of liberal feminist advocacy … the integration of women in development as workers and producers” (Visvanathan et al., 1997:18).

Before the Boserup publication, Third World women’s experiences were subsumed in a common development discourse. Little recognition was given to the patriarchal structures that governed women’s lives, the status and value awarded to these relations or even the obstacles that gender roles and relations created in advancing women’s development (Benería and Gita, 1997). While these enduring inequalities may have strengthened a readiness to rethink development discourses and practice, Boserup’s analysis elevated development discourse to a new status. This was a significant outcome given that gender inequality was a widespread phenomenon that was for a long time ignored in development economics theorisation (Colclough et al., 2003: 5). The following summary captures the significance of this work in the light of the development and is especially significant for Kenya, whose economy is agriculture based:

Boserup’s work showed that women’s agricultural production was critical in sustaining local and national economies; it also documented the negative impact of colonialism and modernisation on these societies especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Visvanathan et al., 1997: 14).

Boserup’s publication secured women the visibility needed for them to gain recognition in development processes. Before this publication there was no critical analysis of women’s role in social and economic development, women were subsumed under the same category as men. Though women were catered for under the United Nations Human Rights Charter of 1945 and a distinction between human rights and the critical concerns of men and women has been on going since the endorsement of this charter in 1945 there has been little else in terms of legislation covering for the needs of women. In fact, the first explicit reference to women from developing countries as a separate category was only made in 1970 (Joekes, 1987:6) even though there had been various documents that speak about gender inequality such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of 1967.

Despite the long road to recognition, by the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) gender equality was a respectable topic within social development discourses. International circles broached the subject of inequality and on the strength of working partnerships with global funding agencies like the World Bank, WID was endorsed through the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Decade (United
As a result, all United Nations women’s conferences – Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1990) – have continued to legitimise the WID approach and concomitantly, liberal feminism as a basis for women’s development.

Like most developing countries, women’s development in Kenya is historically linked to the WID approach (Hay and Stichter, 1984; Staudt, 1985; World Bank, 1989; Robertson and Berger, 1986; Davison, 1989; Ahlberg, 1991; Oboler, 1991; Ongile, 1999). The development of women is linked to employment, health and education and in Kenya the WID approach can be traced to the early years following independence when education expanded to include females. Even so, the WID approach has its shortcomings in that it fails to sustain transformation because it targets individuals rather than communities and partners as agents for social change. The WID approach assumes that when individuals act in their own interest, public interests are also promoted. This is the weakness of the WID framework.

By the beginning of the women’s decade, the limitations of liberal feminism had become evident in the status of women globally and in the Third World (UN, 1986). It was plain that for any meaningful development to take place, women could no longer be framed in isolation of their gender roles and relations:

The inequality of women in most countries stems to a very large extent from mass poverty and the general backwardness of the majority of the world's population caused by underdevelopment, which is a product of imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, apartheid, racism, racial discrimination and of unjust international economic relations. The unfavourable status of women is aggravated in many countries, developed and underdeveloped, by de facto discrimination on the grounds of sex.

It was apparent that there were fewer gains from education than should have been the case. For women to have their social problems eradicated, education was going to have to do more. To this end, the Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (UN, 1986) declared that:

Education is the basis for the promotion and improvement of the status of women. It is the basic tool that should be given to women in order to fulfil their roles as full members of the society.

This consensus elevated education to a level where it was going to have to play a central role in facilitating women’s development. The fact that it was global and driven by the United Nations, 1980) as a global framework for integrating women into development. As a result,
Nations would have important implications on education policy and subsequent trends in developing countries like Kenya.

The document took liberal feminism promoting equal rights. It recommended changes to social and economic structures to facilitate the successful and effective promotion of women’s free access to all types of education, training and employment (UN, 1986: Paragraph 53). It required that governments ensure equality before the law and the provision of facilities for equality of educational opportunities and training for both women and men (UN, 1986: Paragraph 54). This would mean that obstacles to the equality of women created by stereotypes, perceptions of and attitudes towards women be totally removed even if it required additional legislation, and/or the education of the population at large through formal and informal channels (UN, 1986: Paragraph 56).

WID initiatives were already in existence in Kenya, so one would assume that education should have taken a central role in women’s development. This was not the case. The absence of a gender-aware legislation in education until the mid-eighties perpetuated education inequalities, especially access to schooling (see Chapter 2). This was a common phenomenon in most sub-Saharan African countries (see Kelly, 1984; Elliot and Kelly, 1980). It resulted in the slow pace in women’s development.

Other problems arose out of the clash between the WID perspectives the societal constructions of gender. The WID framework tends to be oblivious to the fact that male and female are encultured into various socially and culturally defined roles and responsibilities. The status of girls and women is unequal to that of men in Kenya, yet instead of addressing gender disparities from a social-economic, political, legal, cultural and psychological perspective educational policies have for a long time promoted integration as a means to gender equality in education. ‘Improved access for girls and women’, ‘the closing of the gender gap’ in enrolment and ‘investment in education for development’ have been the catchphrases used by policymakers to describe their strategies to target females (RoK 1998; UNESCO, 2002; 2004). As a strategy, it fails to challenge the status quo because it has little regard for the structural roots that reinforce gender-based differences (Bloch et al., 1998).

WID is informed by liberal feminism whose shortcomings are deliberated below. As already mentioned, liberal feminism is informed by liberalism, a philosophy that concedes to the
equality of all. As such, WID galvanises the social development of women across race, culture and ethnic boundaries. However, the ideology that underpins liberal feminism assumes the neutrality of social contexts, which is where liberal feminism fails because differences abound as a result of social contexts. Social experiences and location lead to different viewpoints on what equality entails and to the different positions embraced by white feminists and non-white feminists (see Collins, 1990 for African American women; Mernissi, 1990; Moghissi, 1991; Ali, 1975 for Muslim women and Mikell, 1997; Mohanty, 1991 for women in the Third World; for African perspectives Meena, 1999; Imam, Mama and Sow, 1999; Assie-Lumumba, 1999a; Mikell, 1997; McKay, 1994; Mannathoko, 1992a; Walker, 1990a). Though all feminists espouse similar values and particularly gender equality, the point of departure between Black and African feminists and their counterparts from the West is the position that liberal feminism can bring about equality on the basis of moral prudence, individual autonomy and self-fulfilment (Tong, 1998:11).

Liberal feminism tends to be blind to social class, race and ethnicity yet these are crucial constructions intersecting and shaping gender in African contexts such as the Kenyan one in this study. This limitation is a point of departure that is necessary for building an in-depth understanding of how there are continued disparities of gender within education in Murang’a district. In addition, because of this limitation there is a need for lenses that make a more critical assessment of the social constructions of gender, which is where socialist and radical feminism add depth of analysis.

3.3.2 WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

Women and development (WAD) is an approach that reacts to the shortcomings of liberal feminism (Rathgeber, 1990). WAD focuses on the relationship between women and the development process, rather than on strategies for integrating women into development, as is the case with WID. WAD takes a critical stance on sexual inequality. It accounts for structural and socio-economic factors within which gender is embedded and is critical of the established structures. It is closely aligned to egalitarian practices and therefore to Marxist feminism which challenges the status quo (see 3.5.2).

Marxist feminism posits that social class factors emanate from the hierarchal structures imposed by capitalism and consumerism. The division of work into private and public
domains is associated with these structures and so is the value of work. Women occupy work in the private domain and it is less valued than work in the public domain, which is a male domain. In developing nations, the private domain has been linked to underpayment and the relegation of women’s work (Boserup, 1970). The WAD approach recognises this differentiation within the world of work. Unlike the WID approach, which would seek to have women integrated into development, it calls for all labour to be valued even when it is undertaken in the private domain. This is because Marxist feminism recognises that patriarchy and capitalism are systemised social orders that place low value on women’s labour.

This critical perspective to women’s work is important to this study. It raises questions about women and work, re-examines and interrogates figures purported to represent gender equality. In contexts like the Kenyan one where the division of male and female labour is entrenched in patriarchy (Robertson and Berger, 1986; Stichter and Parpart, 1988) this Marxist and socialist underpinnings are useful in thinking about how socialisation shapes education choices.

### 3.3.3 GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Four components are useful to consider in the examination of gender using the GAD approach. First, there is sex, which refers to biological form but which can also be culturally constructed. Second, there is gender assignment, which is based on perceived physical features and often linked with biological sex. Third, there is gender identity, which is the feelings and expressions about one’s gender and fourth there is gender role, the behavioural descriptions and expectations about one’s gender. Together, the four components interrogate institutionalised structures and modes of production.

Gender roles are the “socially created expectations of masculine and feminine behaviour” (Richmond-Abbott, 1992:4). The words ‘masculine’, ‘feminine’, ‘male’ and ‘female’ are used interchangeably to describe gender. The term gender denotes ‘sex roles’ and also ‘gender roles’ because gender is often attached to social roles and/or social positions in different ways and according to time and particular society (Richmond-Abbott, 1992:5). In other words, the expectations attributed to gender are defined differently and because it is socially embedded, there are psychological and cultural connotations meanings.
Gender roles as a concept is aligned to critical feminist writers like Anne Oakley (1972; 1974) who raised concern with the use of biological difference as the basis for the separation of men and women roles. In her book *The Sociology of Housework*, Oakley (1974) critically examines women’s work and settles the fact that in modern society’s gender is a culture bound social construction. She points out that the distinctiveness accorded to gender depends on how male and female roles and relationships are constructed, professed and enacted within a given cultural and sociological context. In similar vein, Firestone (1971) and Ortner (1974) have argued that as a collective group, women are an oppressed class because of patriarchal hegemony. The relegation of women to private spheres is associated with domestication. Public spheres are associated with culture and civilisation hence the association of men. Oakley (1972) argues that women’s oppression and subordination arises out of the demarcation of culturally defined gender roles, while Firestone (1971) says subordination emanates from the unequal physical roles in reproduction.

These arguments form the premise for the justification of a gender and development approach as it acknowledges that men and women co-exist in relationships that are defined by their roles and duties. They are a confluence of diverse feminist perspectives in which socialist feminism is dominant (Rathgeber, 1990).

The term gender as used in women development discourses emerged in the 1980s. It was realised that focusing on women in isolation of men has limitations and ignoring the social construction of gender only serves to disadvantage women. Yet, women’s equality is dependent on an understanding of how they are positioned in gendered environments. Understanding that the GAD approach is constituted on the premise that gendered relations are reproduced both in the labour force and through women’s roles in reproduction is particularly important when deliberating gender, equality and education in the Kenyan context.

It is important to note that distinctions between women’s biological function and social roles as brought out by Ortner (1974), Oakley (1972; 1974) and Firestone (1971) are blurred in most Kenyan cultures. This is because in most African communities masculine and feminine attributions are constructed primarily in terms of male and female roles and responsibilities to the community. A woman’s biological role is therefore strongly embedded in the social and cultural construction of whom a woman is. In most Kenyan cultures, a woman’s biological
role, which includes motherhood and childbearing, is not perceived as separate from being a wife and custodian of the home – both social and economic roles. According to Davison, (1989) and Thomas (2003), socio-culturally, being a woman embodies womanhood, femininity and family and so one can begin to understand why among the Kikuyu community, masculinity and femininity are ascribed to social features as opposed to biological ones. This blurredness reinforces the point that culture constitutes an important part of the socialisation of a people (Oakley, 1972), which means then that gender ought to be constituted from that lens.

For obvious reasons, posterity is highly valued in African communities (Mbiti, 1969) and so among the Kikuyu, the value for women in the community is found in childbearing, motherhood and marriage (Kenyatta, 1934). These societal values are expressed in various cultural aphorisms.

The literary genre carries the cultural heritage of a people and their function in social contexts. According to Schipper (1991:1), proverbs and sayings ingeniously embody an admitted truth or common belief. African proverbs reveal the philosophy and thinking of African people and unlike other literary forms, proverbs and sayings are succinct, a quality that captures the values, attitudes and perceptions of a people with regard to the social roles, social position and character traits of men and women (ibid.). In this study, proverbs are used as an illustration of how gender norms and values are entrenched in the collective consciousness and expression of a people.

There are countless proverbs from around Africa that resound the social expectation that women must reproduce and that they cannot be fulfilled without children:

- The woman whose sons have died is richer than a barren woman (Gikuyu, Kenya).
- Beauty without children cannot prosper (Mongo, Zaire)

The marriage institution in traditional African societies is for posterity and legitimatising children. In the context of our modern societies it is somehow far-fetched to think that the reproductive function of a woman still defines her value in most African communities. But this is the truth. The proverbs below reinforce that the woman is largely important for her biological role and that her ability to leave a lineage carries prize value in diverse African communities:
One who has given birth does not wither (Kundu, Cameroon).
He who has no work to do can dig the spinster’s grave (Minyanka, Mali).
A wife is in the man’s compound for the sake of the child (Maprusi, Burkina Faso).

Unlike education where the individual and social benefits are not always visible and take a long time to accrue, for the majority of women childbearing and motherhood is an immediate and visible achievement. Motherhood is a significant social milestone that has respect and social recognition.

The societal status awarded to childbearing and motherhood is partly responsible for the endemic problem of teenage pregnancy and early marriages in Africa. In communities where this role remains unchallenged the participation and survival of girls in school is equally problematic. In countries like Mali, Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, Ethiopia and even some parts of Kenya, there is a markedly high birth rate among teenagers (Mensch, Clark, Lloyd, and Erulkar, 1999; FAWE, 1994) and at the same time low school enrolment among girls (UNESCO, 2002; 2004). Such scenarios suggest that education of girls comes into competition with reproductive roles and expectations of motherhood. The five proverbs cited so far demonstrate the blur between biological and social roles. It appears too that the former takes precedence and defines ‘woman’.

The four proverbs below demonstrate that while social attributes and expectations for women might vary through the different phases of life, there are paradoxes with each stage. For instance, although girlhood is enviable, the female gender is not, unless for posterity:

To bear a girl is to bear a problem (Tigrinya, Ethiopia).
Brought up among boys, the young girl weakens (Kikuyu, Kenya).
One girl misbehaves; all are insulted (Rwanda, Rwanda).
A clan with female posterity cannot perish (Kingo, Zaire).

Others overtly indicate who is in charge. They are illustrative of the dominant patriarchal ideology and that the social value of females is second to that of males.

The daughter is not a guest (Kirwanda, Rwanda).
None is abused for having a daughter as long as he can still bring forth a son (Kirwanda, Rwanda).

The ones below represent the paradox in the social role and position of women:

Woman is like the earth: everyone sits down on her (Lingala, Zaire).
Woman is like the earth: even a fool sits down on her (Lingala, Zaire).
The first proverb implies that the woman is vulnerable to misuse and even abuse, while the second portrays her as close to nature one from whom sustenance is drawn, a contrasting figure of a caregiver and nurturer. Others bearing a similar theme reflect modern day stereotypes with regard to women’s position in the social hierarchy. They question the character, integrity and abilities of women and even discount female intelligence:

Women are like gourds: they cannot balance (Kikuyu, Kenya).
Believe a woman’s word the day after (Kikuyu, Kenya).
A woman is more than her breasts; goats also have two (Kirwanda, Rwanda).
Woman is a goat; man a bright red kola nut (Yaka, Zaire).

Power and social position is highly contested terrain in gendered societies. In the proverbs below female intellectual abilities are portrayed as being very low, however, at the same time they are acknowledged to exist but then only as a threat:

A woman and an invalid are the same thing (Kikuyu, Kenya).
Woman’s intelligence is that of a child (Benin, Senegal).
Never marry a woman with bigger feet than your own (Sena, Malawi/ Mozambique).

Finally, the proverb below underscores some of the tensions African communities have had to undergo with regard to formal female education. It is from the Fanti of Ghana and is attributed to the Ghanaian scholar Dr James Emmanuel Kweczyir-Aggrey (1875-1927) who probably used it to convince African parents to allow their female children to attend missionary schools. In retrospection, it is this same philosophy that underpins initiatives to improve female education like Education For All:

If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family (nation) (Fanti, Ghana).

Defining gender through a selection of African proverbs is unusual. However, one benefit of the GAD approach to women’s development is that it seeks to understand gendering and the nuances of gender inequalities. This thinking makes the analysis of proverbs illuminating for a study of this kind. These literary forms provide insights into significant social aspects, which intersect on education. In part the proverbs give an insightful understanding of values and beliefs. They help to illuminate the African perspective to gender and show that “men and women are the products of their culture, their values and their history” (Sow, 1999:45). More importantly they demonstrate that “women are constituted through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion and other ideological institutions and frameworks” (Mohanty, 2003:30).
Rather than nullify semblance these proverbs endorse that social reality is characterised by a ‘universalised patriarchy’. The notion that all women suffer a similar oppression is not contested.

If one were to consider women’s education the history and development of education in Kenya (see 2.2), these proverbs describe a social condition that is real and that has been the key drawback to women’s participation in education. The proverbs point to a contextual reality that is inherently gendered, yet at the same time, one that underpins the development of women achievable only through education. Essentially, the education of women and girls in Kenya is paradoxical. It is a case were, “theories of cultural and social reproduction … still raise interesting questions for the sociology of women’s education” (Arnot, 2002:37). In Arnot’s view, class and gender are intertwined aspects operating in hierarchical forms. They have the ability to harmonise or destabilise the social structure. It means that there is the possibility of differentiated educational experiences for males and females because, as Francis (2000:72) argues “we are not all positioned in the same way in gender discourse”.

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I have argued that economic development is dependent on quality education and in developing countries like Kenya, on the education of women many of whom are found in the non-formal economic sector. I have described three approaches to women’s development and the theories underlying them. I have demonstrated that there is differentiated access to and control over resources, different needs and priorities, different constraints and opportunities and bargaining power within schooling. Despite these challenges, I have maintained that education is integral to women’s development.

The following section deliberates the function of the feminist theories informing WID, WAD and GAD within education and schooling. It highlights the influence of liberal feminism, social feminism and radical feminism on education. I advance the need for a more rigorous standpoint to interrogate gender equality in education in Murang’a district, Kenya, where gender parity in school enrolment is secured but girls are yet to make inroads in terms of quality education output and outcomes for education to be described as truly ‘gender equal’.
3.3.4 EDUCATION FROM A WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

As already mentioned in earlier sections of this chapter, social equality is central to the liberalism school of political thought which explains why gender equality is aligned to civil and political rights (Hughes, 2002; Donovan, 2001; Abbot and Wallace, 1997; Tong, 1989). Because of this anchorage, liberal feminism has had longevity in the field of development. It has developed in scope and influence; including informing women’s development initiatives in Third World countries for over four decades (Moser, 1993). And because it is agreeable with functionalist theory, human capital theory and modernisation theory, the three social theories endorsed by international funding agencies like the World Bank, and United Nations development agencies (Stromquist, 1998; Moser, 1993), liberal feminism has continued to informed education in developing countries. According to Unterhalter (2005:18) “WID has had strongest resonance for analysis of education in governments and inter government organisations. The most influential policy thinking on gender, education and development in the 1990s drew on this approach …” It is no surprise then that from the endorsement of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1975, most development initiatives have continued to focus on resolving poverty related social issues such as women’s health, food production, access to schooling and job creation. In education WID driven policy frameworks have focussed on equality of access and equality of resources. While all these endeavour to attain the ideals of social equality because of the heterogeneity of in individual countries, varied approaches to human development have of necessity emerged over the years.

There are five different approaches to policy governing women’s development under the WID framework (Moser, 1993:56-57): the welfare, the equality, the antipoverty, the efficiency and the empowerment approach. These five have been necessitated by unrelenting social realities, which in some countries have resulted in the deterioration of women’s condition (see UNDP, 2004 for the case of Kenya where despite continued investment in education, deterioration in quality of livelihood has been reported).

The condition of the world’s women is a serious thing and it is important to note that while there are Millennium Development Goals (MDG) geared towards alleviating poverty and other social ills, education plays a key role. For a long time, the education of women in developing countries has been linked to fertility control, disease awareness and management, food production and environmental management, (Psacharopoulos, 1973). In recent years,
entrepreneurship, leadership and the use of technology including ICTs have become included. Whatever the focus, education has been identified as instrumental to improving livelihoods in most sectors of women’s lives (Stromquist, 1998, 1999) as the returns are high on their social and economic well-being (Schultz, 1993 and 1989b; Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985:287-313). Perhaps, except for the development of global partnerships the achievement of all ten MDGs hinge on access to schooling and quality education.

For most Third World countries, the attainment of these social and economic returns is pegged to primary school education. It explains why the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) is so important. Universal Primary Education denotes improved access to schooling. Once access is improved, it is assumed that both girls and boys are able to secure equal education opportunities and perhaps even equal life chances. The Universal Primary Education concept takes a “welfare” and “equality” approach to education (Moser, 1993) and espouses the tenets of liberal feminism aligned to the WID approach. The underlying assumption is that education will lead to improved social welfare and for women high social returns on livelihood.

The WID approach is associated with the welfare approach of the seventies. The focus of the approach then was predominantly on education for improved livelihood and in particular reproductive health. The publication *Fertility and Education: What do we really know?* (Cochrane, 1979) found that the benefits of female education extended to reproductive health. Cochrane’s findings concluded that a high correlation existed between women’s schooling level and a decline in infant mortality and fertility rates. The study concluded that with each successive year of schooling, females recorded improved choice, decision-making, autonomy and productivity. Later studies have been consistent on the accrued benefits of education to women’s reproductive health and controlled fertility (Jejeebhoy, 1995; Dyson and Moore, 1983); women’s contribution to economic growth particularly through agriculture based production (Dollar and Gatti, 1999; Quisumbing, 1996); and investment in children’s schooling (Haddad, 1999; Hill and King, 1995; Schultz, 1989a). In addition, women with education show a higher interest in sending their children to school as compared to those without any education (Dighe, 1998: 420-421).

Poverty alleviation and quality livelihood are social realities that warrant a social welfare approach to education. However, there are shortcomings to this approach particularly with
regard to sustainability. Fertility control and reduced child mortality are critical to women’s development but these cannot be the only concerns of women in Third World countries. Education statistics show that female participation in education has improved in many developing countries in sub-Saharan African countries including Kenya (UNESCO, 2000a; UNDP, 1998, 1999, 2000), however, the most recent demographic health report on the country shows that fertility has increased (RoK, 2004a). The average number of children per woman has risen from 4.0 to 4.6 and the percentage of unwanted births 21%. These changes have a correlation with schooling. Studies done in Kenyan primary schools have established a link between female maturation, low academic attainment and incomplete education cycles (Lloyd, Mensch and Clark 1998; Mensch et al.: 1999).

The argument that each successive year of schooling provides women with better skills to manage their reproductive health is borne out of the concept of equality and welfare. But, the current state in women’s reproductive health in Kenya appears to suggest that the welfare approach has been inadequate. First, the approach overestimates the capacity of basic education to empower and emancipate women. It assumes that functional literacy is sufficient and that taking charge of maternal, child health and family hygiene is among the biggest gains that women can make from their education. Second, the welfare approach assumes women to be passive recipients of development (Moser, 1993: 55-58), so women’s participation in education is perceived solely in terms of ‘improved livelihood’ as given to them, and not as a choice made by them. As such, other equally important aspects are sidelined because women are portrayed as inactive and as having little need for education and perhaps even few aspirations given this rather wanting justification for their education. With this kind of a rationale, one need not wonder why the emancipation of African women is delayed.

Progression from WID to WAD to GAD reveals that needs to women’s development are broad, however, in all three education plays a pivotal role. It is timely therefore to focus on the feminism theories that inform these approaches and how they link to gender, equality and education discourse.

Though different feminisms have prioritises different aspects of women’s struggle against oppressive forces (Weiner, 1994; Unterhalter, 2005), Arnot and Weiner (1987) posit that three perspectives have had the most impact on education. They are identified as:

- ‘equal rights education’ associated with liberal feminism
• ‘class, race and gender: structures and ideologies’ associated with socialist/Marxist feminism
• ‘patriarchal relations’ associated with radical feminism

Given that construction of gender is intricately woven into and shaped by traditions, beliefs and values, this study considers the three theoretical standpoints as able to offer critical lenses for the examination of girls’ education in Kenya. Each takes a different perspective to the gender question and so each raises different questions about girls’ education. Different reasons for the educational choices girls make with regard to school subjects, careers and higher education can be expected enriching our understandings of gender and girls education.

3.4 FEMINISM THEORY IN EDUCATION

Feminist ideology is rooted in the condition and situation of women. Feminism as a theory is not homogenous. As Tong (1989:1) aptly captures it:

… feminist theory is not one, but many, theories or perspectives … each feminist theory or perspective attempts to describe women’s oppression, to explain its causes and consequences, and to prescribe strategies for women’s liberation. The more skilfully the feminist theory can combine description, explanation, and prescription, the better the theory is.

There are numerous perspectives from which to deliberate the problems of women besides the better known liberal, socialist and radical feminism theories. Psychoanalytic, existentialist/post-modern and Black feminism constitute further developments in feminist thinking.

Education is one of the social sectors where the contribution of feminism has been significant. The contribution is more in the West where feminist research has had a history in academia. For this reason, using feminist lenses on girls’ education in Kenya is in one respect charting new terrain. But it is, an appropriate way to pose questions on girls education because girls education is embedded in a social context.

Since the seventies when the feminist perspective began to challenge the assumptions and stereotypes about women within education (Acker, 1994:27), feminism has become a theoretical discourse that has infiltrated almost all aspects of education research leading to awareness and sensitivity to gender issues within education and schooling. The feminist approach “questions through making problematic those commonsense assumptions about
women and women’s education that have so far passed for fact” (Acker 1994: 37) and has in recent years enforced the reassessment and reinterpretation of data and findings from past studies.

Feminism aims to advance social justice within education (Arnot and Weiler, 1993) and is widely used in education to design, implement, monitor and evaluate education policy with regard to the state of gender within schools and curricula. Through this lens contributions have been made to education reform, pedagogy, curriculum, policy and subsequently to gender equity in education and schooling.

A feminist lens interrogates and raises questions which make it especially relevant to education in sub-Saharan Africa where the education of girls is characterised by inequalities, oppression and gendered differences (Mannathoko, 1992b:447-453). Although these maybe universal conditions, their nature differs with context, which is where feminist research lenses become relevant. “The inequalities theories” can be aligned to liberal feminism, “the theories of difference” to social and Marxist feminism and “the theories of gender oppression” to radical feminism (ibid., 1992b: 447-453). Research aligned to these perspectives is able to interrogate education much further than the mandates of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Education For All (EFA).

It has always been the aim of the Kenyan government to make education available to its citizens. However, under the pressure of meeting EFA targets, the provision of quality education which includes among other things gender equity can become lost in the quest to increase education opportunities (see 2.2.3; 2.3; 2.3.1). EFA is primarily developed within a WID framework. The WID views education and schooling as a public domain whereby education is seen to improve the social and economic well being of the public as a collective. Considering that this is a limitation of the WID approach, it is reasonable to assess schooling experiences and the education choices and opportunities available to those already in the system. It is in questioning how equal education opportunities are, what the potential is for quality output and outcomes vis-à-vis access and retention that the interplay of gender on education and reasons for choice or lack of it become evidence.

The *Master Plan on Education and Training 1997-2010* states that education opportunities in Kenya are equal for boys and girls (see 2.3.2). I raise issue with the claim using secondary
school education. I examine education policy, the secondary school curriculum and raise issue with the nature of female access to equal education opportunities. The application of liberal, socialist and radical feminism in the Kenyan education context becomes evident here.

3.4.1 LIBERAL FEMINISM

Liberal feminism has been described as “the most enduring and accepted of all feminisms”. According to Weiner (1994:54), liberal feminism:

asserts that individual women should be as free as men to determine their social political and education roles and that any laws, traditions and activities that inhibit equal rights and opportunities should be abolished. This means that the conceptual foundation of liberal feminism in education is associated with policies and legislation that promote equal opportunities, the eradication of socialisation and sexual stereotyping and sexual discrimination. Access to education is fundamental to this perspective since it claims that by providing equal education for both sexes, the environment would be created in which individual women’s (and men’s) potential can be encouraged and developed. Liberal feminists also assume that equality for women can be achieved by democratic reforms, without the need for revolutionary changes in economic, political or cultural life.

The National Gender and Development Policy in Kenya endeavours to secure such equal opportunities for women in general and in education more specifically. The policy specifically recommends policies that will “enhance and sustain measures to eliminate gender disparities in access, retention, transition and performance in education for both boys and girls” (RoK, 2000b:22). Such polices typify the liberal feminist agenda where democratic reform translates education into equal opportunities. Such policies also sanction that Schiefelbein and Farrell’s (1980) access, survival, education output and outcomes model (see 1.2) as critical to the attainment of equal education opportunities. These policies are the typical foundation of education equity in developing countries. They assume that access to schooling will yield similar levels of achievement and subsequently similar educational qualifications and employment prospects (Acker 1994: 45).

In Kenya, achieving access to schooling let alone equality of education opportunities is a challenge, more particularly at the level of post primary education. This is because prevailing policies and legislation treat post primary education differently because of national educational priorities.

Most education policies in sub-Saharan Africa tend to place emphasis on the need for gender parity in basic education as advanced in liberal feminism thinking (see Stromquist, 1989;
1998; Schultz, 1989a). Liberal feminism also tends to be endearing to hegemonic structures like human capital and modernisation theory (Rathgeber, 1990:489). This explains why the attainment of Universal Primary Education (RoK, 1998; UNESCO, 2002; 2004) has continued to be the focus of education in Kenya and most sub Saharan countries when its sustainability has come under question (Bray, 1986; Abagi, 1995).

Education access is evidence that liberal feminism is oriented to practical implementation on the ground. But, the responsibility for implementation or making education available remains with the state. In countries where education policy is guided by such liberal thinking, the state is viewed as the benevolent benefactor and the school as the place where education equality interventions take place (Stromquist, 2001). The attainment of equal education opportunities is viewed as dependent on access and resources and so in a country like Kenya, the focus of education is basic education because it is the level of education deemed most accessible to the majority of Kenyans (RoK, 1998; 2003).

State interventions include increasing access to schooling and resource allocations. This is evidenced in the building of more schools and the provision of free primary education. While it is not the interest of this study to dwell on basic education, it is important to point out that a primary school education in Kenya is only able to provide basic skills (see 3.4.1). This in itself is problematic and it is my contention that the importance laid on this level of education only helps to deny the vast majority of the population of a more comprehensive education. Liberal feminism has a part to play in this. As “the most enduring and accepted of all feminisms” (Weiner, 1994:54), it has been the dominant approach informing gender equity in education for decades. Yet, the state of women’s education has remained unchanged in terms of the quality (FAWE, 2003; Stromquist, 2001; UNESCO, 2001; 2003). Only the numbers look good. This is the weakness of liberal feminism.

According to communitarian and socialist critiques, tendency for liberal feminism to uphold gender-neutral humanism over gender specific bias is unrealistic and limiting particularly where interventions have to be made, as is the case with gender redress in education. Liberal feminism overemphasis individual freedom over common good (Tong, 1989:31-37). For Mannathoko (1992a:445) liberal feminism, as an ideology, is unable to address the deep-rooted gender inequities and the interdependence between gender and other indicators of equity such as ethnicity and social class. These are problem areas for education in sub-
Saharan Africa. For the pervading pedagogy of difference, as is the case in education in Kenya (2.2.1.3; 2.3.2.1), there requires a more radical standpoint. This is because improvements in the balance of gender in schools do not guarantee commensurate improvement in education quality much less, the quality of women’s lives. An argument put forward by Stromquist (1989) more than a decade ago illuminates this point even better:

Most studies define equality as “equal educational opportunity” – a notion that argues that everyone should be given the opportunity to receive an education, but that makes no reference to the process nor to the outcome of such an event. A few studies consider that access to facilities and services is not enough and that equality should also mean the likelihood of completing a given educational cycle. Even fewer studies hold that equality is reached when individuals obtain similar levels of knowledge and select occupations that are evenly distributed. From a feminist perspective, it matters very much that equality occur at each of the four levels contemplated by Schiefelbein and Farrell. Educational access without completion, completion without learning and learning without social recognition does little to ensure women in society (Stromquist, 1989:144).

According to British feminist theorist Sandra Acker (1987), equal education opportunities are equivalent to equal rights, which is why liberal feminists consider school access a right that facilitates the attainments of education equity. For Mannathoko (1992b), this is the shortcoming of the inequality theories. The focus on school access leaves out other aspects of equality, and it also makes school access appear the best way to achieve social mobility. The focus assumes that all levels being equal, there is the creation of equal opportunity (Prewitt, 1974; Stromquist, 1989). The strategies adapted to promote education for all in Kenya are based on this premise.

O’Brien (1983), Weiner (1986) and Acker (1987) criticise liberal feminism for failing to raise issues of patriarchy, power and the systematic subordination of women, while Arnot (1982) and Acker (1987) raise the issue of race and class on education. These are the factors that play on the context within which girls thrive or die through their education. As such, it is not enough for researchers seeking to understand girls’ education in rural sub-Saharan African contexts to get to the gate of the school. A keen researcher has to go inside the school and inside girls schooling and classroom experiences and at the same time take with them the contexts that represent the girls’ lived world, social reality or social location.

The concept of social location can be described as the way we express the core of our existence in the social and political world. The expression emanates from what is around us; it is about how we are positioned in relation to others, in relation to the dominant culture of
our society and to the rest of the world. Social location also determine the kinds of power and privilege we have access to and can exercise, as well as situations in which we have less power and privilege (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2001:58). According to Wylie (2003:31) “what counts as a ‘social location’ is structurally defined.”

Considering context in this way is integral to a better understanding of girls’ education because globally, the status of women has become far more complex than it was three centuries ago (Mohanty, 1991). Though women may appear to be homogenous as a social group their context, history and social locale differentiates and defines them variously. Even within single countries, there is no heterogeneity. South Africa illustrates this well even though its apartheid history might be argued to be the reason behind its racial, cultural and ethnic diversity (see McKay, 1994; Meena, 1999). In Kenya, location has been found to have divisive implications on education access and survival (Kakonge et al., 2001; Mungai, 2002; Alwy and Schech, 2004; UNESCO, 2004). Race, cultural and ethnic histories constitute contextual diversities that are significant to gender issues in education and consequently to this study, but they are not catered for under liberal feminism.

Other shortcomings with the liberal feminism perspective have to do with its alignment with ‘inherited education systems’. The state and education are bedfellows, which mean that education is shaped by the prevailing conditions within a state. This is found in the fact that the status of education in most African countries goes back to colonial education policies (Watson, 1982b). In Zimbabwe, from the colonial period up till now, the state has perpetuated educational inequality because of gender blind legislation and education policies (Gordon, 1994 and 1996b). The scenario is similar in Kenya where the silence on gender in key education documents has caused girls to become more disadvantaged than boys in secondary education (see 2.2.1and 2.3.2.1).

Second, there is the problem of equality versus equity. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, female enrolment in secondary schools in Murang’a district is higher than that of males but even so, education output and outcomes for girls do not measure up to the high enrolment. Although the district has 11 girls’ schools compared to 3 boys’ schools, boys achieve higher grades in science and mathematics at KCSE (Kenya, Murang’a District Education Office 2000c). In addition, there are more boys than girls from this district who secure admission into public universities (Achola, 1997). Quite evidently there is a discrepancy between access
and outcomes. The paradox lies in the fact that liberal feminism secures for access to schooling for girls but it fails to secure them the more substantive features of educational equality which would enable them to attain higher and even competitive output and outcomes from their education (see Subrahmanian, 2003 in section 2.3.2.1.1). If education output and outcomes are significant features of education equality, then what occurs inside schools must be deliberated and explained. This is because the gendered differences in girls’ education go beyond access; they extend to girls’ experiences of schooling and to their education choices.

3.4.2 SOCIALIST FEMINISM

The imbalances of gender that are a pervasive feature of gender and education in sub-Saharan Africa are school enrolment and factors impeding upon female access to schooling. Few studies focus on gender differentiation because of in school factors and the prevalence of inequalities within the education system as a whole (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1992; Davison and Kanyuka, 1992; Gordon, 1994; Juma, 1994; Wamahiu, Opondo and Nyagah, 1996). Yet, these should be the places where interrogation ought to be made with regard to women’s position within the economy and the family (Tong, 1989; Abbot and Wallace, 1997).

Questions about female invisibility and marginalisation are influenced by the growth of Marxism in the social sciences (Meillassoux 1975 cited in Sow, 1999:36). In the context of girls’ education, the Marxist approach lends lenses to interrogate rural contexts, a social space that the majority of Kenyan women occupy (see 3.3.1 for women’s position in rural African economy). Since the approach is critical of ‘blame to the individual’ common with Western capitalistic frames on women’s oppression, the approach allows for one to be critical of all structures that touch on women both in private and public roles. It takes cognisance of the intertwining roles that women occupy in food production, childbearing, kinship (ibid.) and is known to link women’s oppression, to class oppression which in turn draws attention to the structures of dominance, namely state, class and family. Sociologists of education like Arnott (1981) use Marxist theories to draw attention to the relationship between education and the political economy including how schools reproduce sexual and social divisions of labour within the family and the workplace.

The gendered division of labour is representative of sexual asymmetries and its reproduction within the family and workplace has an impact on girls’ education. These social divisions of
labour have been identified as the more blatant forms of gender inequality working against education equality in sub-Saharan Africa (Okojie, 2001; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995; King and Hill, 1993; Elliot and Kelly, 1980) and have been priority research themes on female education in Africa (Stromquist, 1989; Hyde, 1995). Research has established that attitudes and influences emanating from family and community socialisations (Wynd, 1995; Abagi, Wamahiu and Owino, 1997); social class including those perpetuated by rural and urban disparities (Mungai, 2002; Swainson, 1995; Brock and Cammish, 1994; Eshiwani, 1982), social culture (Abagi, 1995; FAWE, 1994) to be particularly militating on female education. In addition, there is also the lack of educational resources and trained teachers (King and Hill, 1993), lack of schools and resources (Brock and Cammish, 1997) and binding domestic duties (Mungai, 2002; Kitetu, 1998).

The state is a stakeholder in education however, even if well-meaning, macro level policies can be an agent of subordination which is why a socialist feminism perspective becomes an important lens. Stromquist (1990:146) has found that the state “acts jointly and closely with economic interests to keep women in subordinate position.” Socialist feminism maintains the view that the state has no agenda to advance education equality in any meaningful way.

This stance adds rigour and critique to the lens used in this study because of the Marxist argument that within the capitalistic state, education is an ally to the reproduction of gender division (Arnot and Weiner, 1987). This lens is used to interrogate power and privilege within schooling the assumption being that school is a vehicle of induction and socialisation. The same lens is also used to question micro and macro institutional processes influencing education and schooling. Similarly, home background, the immediate and broader school community and formal and non-formal curricula executed in schools.

The justification for the use of these lens on girls’ schooling in rural Kenyan schools might appear far-fetched. But, in the book *Schooling in capitalistic America: Economic reform and the contradictions of economic life*, Bowles and Gintis (1976) demonstrate the power of structures in that characterise capitalistic lifestyle ideals among children in modern day American schools. While the authors point to commercial infiltration in the schooling system as the cause, the American corporation take over is comparable to that of the church in 17th and 18th century Europe (see 2.2.1.1). Like schooling in England, structures in American schools perpetuate social class stratification that reflects different aspirations for the middle
class (bourgeoisie) and working class (proletariat) (ibid.). Macro factors such as church influence on education or the state of a country's political economy are powerful and can lead students into different paths despite the provision of similar education opportunities.

Other factors are gender, class, race and ethnicity. Though individual social features, combined they interact to complicate and further compromise the position and condition of women in society. The “triple oppression of women” as McKay (1994: 357) describes it is an acute form of discrimination that characterises the lives of Black women and women of African descent, particularly in rural sub-Saharan Africa. The triple oppression of women is also the point of departure by Black and African feminists from Western socialist feminism. Collins (1990), Hooks (1984) and Walker (1990b) have argued that race, class and ethnicity are not merely additional ways of examining the condition of women but are the very essence of it.

The advantage of socialist feminism lens is that it accounts for the situation of women at the grassroots; the disenfranchised working class and the rural women (Gaidzanwa, 1992).

In this study, socialist feminism usefully engages with the ways that girls experience schooling. Unlike liberal feminism, which would attribute the choices and decisions to the individual, socialist feminism is more rigorous and aware that schooling experiences are not devoid social constructions that are gender, class, race, and ethnically biased.

Gender, class, race, and ethnicity aggravate gendered differences between men and women and among women. All over the world Black women have historically been at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Odim-Johnson, 1991; Collins, 1990; Giddings, 1985; Hooks 1984). Social stratification and the differences that go with it are manifest in education. At the same time, it is important to point out that studies are beginning to challenge what constitutes ‘disadvantage’. Emerging from South Africa is a study that shows that social class prevails over race among the upper middle class raising class rather than race as a social issue in post apartheid South Africa (Fiske and Ladd, 2004).

Social feminism has application to girls’ education in Kenya, because as females, girls carry into school the social and cultural milieu of their community’s particularly societal constructions of women. Disparities between social classes, geographical areas, males and
females in education are known (Prewitt, 1974; Cooksey, Court and Makau, 1994). A case in point is the North Eastern Province where ethnicity and gender intersect creating education underdevelopment with particularly negative consequences on gender inequality in one geographical region (Kakonge et al., 2001). For Alwy and Schech (2004), ethnicity is a social inequality in education that is comparable to gender inequality.

Given that school is a place where social class values are both perpetuated and contested, a socialist feminism perspective offers a lens to interrogate the social structures that impact on girls’ education. They include the history and development of gender and education in Kenya (see section 2.3), the school, the curriculum and the family.

3.4.3 RADICAL FEMINISM

Radical feminism is associated with the works of critical feminists like Anne Oakley (1972) whose book *Sex, gender and society* explores the role of reproduction and female subjugation; Shulamith Firestone’s (1971) *The dialectic of sex: The case for feminist revolution* which explores sexual power and Kate Millet’s (1970) *Sexual Politics* which examines the social class system and modes of production. Unlike liberal and socialist feminism, radical feminism resound the dissident voice; it is a feminism of disenchantment with male domination (Tong, 1989). With focus on male power and patriarchy, radical feminism offers radical solutions to the discrimination of women. It advances, among other things, for a feminist revolution.

Unlike liberal and socialist feminism, whose ideology has a basis for praxis, radical feminism has been criticised for being too theoretical (Tong, 1989), a criticism that is also made of radical feminism in education (Weiner, 1994 and Acker, 1994). The criticism not withstanding, there are at least three ways in which radical feminism is relevant to gender and education. The first is in the connection radical feminism makes between school life, the economy and the family. The second relates to the ownership of culture and knowledge, the third to sexual politics of everyday life in school.

The economy and the family are social as well as patriarchal structures that have a bearing on women’s lives and the quality of their livelihood. The nature and extent to which these structures oppress women depends on social class stratification, geographical location,
economic and cultural positioning. The geographical location is especially important to note because it differentiates women’s experiences of patriarchal oppression. In as far as patriarchal oppression within education is concerned the women in the Third World tend to be worse off compared with those women in developed countries. The conditions under which girls access education are harsher and more restrictive. Still, in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa women denied the right to education and for those who manage to access schooling the experience is marked with gendering (UNESCO 2004: 67-68). It is no wonder that sub-Saharan Africa has unstable retention rates in primary education and low transition rates from primary to secondary education (ibid.).

Having said that, it is important to note that much as radical feminists have argued that the problems of women arise from male dominance, women’s experiences are not the same even where they suffer oppression as a collective group. The degree and magnitude of oppression varies depending on embedded patriarchy is within socio-culture and history. Social class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, global and social location and even personal preference all impact on oppression so the magnitude and experience cannot be the same. Though women’s oppression may reverberate in similar ways from one context to another, the social positioning of women rather than patriarchy alone creates an oppressive regime. For this reason, patriarchal and the consequent effects of male dominant on education or any other social aspect of women’s lives for that matter, must be understood in the context of social and historical processes. This is the conclusion of education sociologists Brah and Minhas (1985) in their study of Black communities in Britain and Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1992) who aptly argue that the notion ‘woman’ does not denote the same thing. This understanding of social differentiation is the gender awareness that Longwe (1991) argues is critical to the success of development projects in the Third World. The same can be said of gender issues in education.

In education, patriarchy denotes hegemonic structures that oppress women and militate against their access, participation and completion of education. Radical feminism views the state as a key agent in the perpetuation of women’s subordination (Stromquist, 1990:137). The school is viewed as a place where injustice and oppression of certain categories of people occurs, for example, girls, gays. However, unlike liberal and socialist feminism, radical feminism advocates for the eradication of all hegemonic structures (including policies) that threaten the emancipation of women and the oppressions of minorities. The radical feminist
stance is that structures can be dismantled in much the same way that culturally defined roles responsibilities change over time and space. Radical feminism takes a revolutionary standpoint that advocates for action through radical policy reform. Weiner (1994:24) refers to it “consciousness raising” as it borrows from socialist Marxist feminism.

Interrogating education from the perspective of radical feminism is crucial if adequate explanations for the continued gendered inequalities in education are to be offered. Radical feminism also explains why women are unable to access an equivalent status with men even when they have similar access to education opportunities. By drawing linkages between economic and social development in the Third World and dependency theory, it is possible to explain why women in Africa continue to be the least beneficiaries from formal education even when it is made available to them. The structures perpetuate the continued supply of low skilled and unskilled labour and until they are dismantled, education will serve to benefit only the minority of women; those with cultural and social capital.

The second thing that radical feminism in education is concerned with is male monopolisation of culture and knowledge and sexual politics of everyday school life (Acker, 1987:429; Weiner, 1994:54), curriculum, female teachers and girls’ access to power (Taylor, 1995; Whyte, Deem, Kant and Cruickshank, 1985) and policy formulation in schools (Kenway, 1990).

In Kenya, besides the groundbreaking study on the portrayal of women in primary school textbooks by Obura (1991) no other study has taken a critical stance on the school curriculum. The same applies to the sexual politics of everyday schooling (Mensch, Clark, Llloyd and Erulkar, 1999). The latter was actually motivated more by HIV/AIDS interventionist strategies that have become commonplace in education research in developing nations than the fact that sex and sexuality had become features on the school landscape.

As already discussed radical feminism deals with the concept of patriarchy and power which become translated into the everyday schooling realities as gender inequalities. Radical feminism is revolutionary and the single-sex girls’ school is an intervention that is designed to break the patriarchal barriers that impede on girls’ survival and achievement. In this section following, I introduce single-sex schooling and examine single-sex and mixed-sex education
and related debates; single-sex schooling legislation, the social organisation of single sex and finally the implications on girls’ secondary education in Kenya.

3.5 THE RISE OF THE SINGLE-SEX SCHOOL

Until the 1980s, the main research work undertaken on co-education (mixed) and single-sex schooling was Dale (1974). In his study Dale argued that single-sex schools did not prepare students for the mixed sex world in which they would eventually have to function. His study opened up extended debate on single-sex and co-education. These debates have gone on for nearly three decades in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand. They extend to African countries like Kenya and Botswana where single-sex education is believed to be a means to gender equity in education. Continued debate emanating from developed countries, like the United States contribute to questions that may be asked in a country like Kenya where research on the area is in its infancy.

Public education is free in the United States and schools are predominantly co-educational (Caplice, 1994). But, the renewed interest in single-sex schooling is reinvigorated by a call for its institutionalisation of single sex education in public education (Hubbard and Datnow, 2002). Most single-sex education is offered in private schools. While this is a reasonable move considering that amendments to the ‘No Child Left Behind’ Act create provision for single-sex choice within the public schooling system, single-sex education within public education contravenes the equal protection clause and Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programmes or activities that receive federal financial assistance. These laws render the institutionalisation of public single-sex schooling in the United States legally a complex and challenging endeavour (Tully, 2002; O’Reilly, 2001). The debate around public single-sex schooling is especially topical and relevant to Kenya not only because the provision of such education is a democratic and civil right but also because single-sex schools in Kenya are public.

In her book *Same, Different, Equal: Rethinking Single-Sex Schooling*, Salomone (2003) argues that single-sex schools are one of several options that serve the needs of a diverse population pointing out that “within single sex education … the principles of liberty (in the form of choice) and equality (in the form of equal educational opportunity) are clearly reconcilable and mutually reinforcing despite assertions to the contrary” (ibid.:65) In other
words, if America is to effectively meet its objectives for education then single-sex programmes have a place in public education. Salomone hints at the discrepancies within the American schooling system that appear to suggest that schools have become inaccessible yet they are available.

The issue of education inclusiveness has legal implication in the United States and it is therefore a serious matter. Since the publication *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (AAUW, 1992), its sequel *Separated by Sex: A critical Look at Single-sex Education* (AAUW, 1998) by the American Association of University Women and *Failing at Fairness* by Sadker and Sadker (1994), girls have become identified with vulnerability as social group within the American education system. Though it is primarily those from the low social economic bracket who are more vulnerable, males from minority communities also fall into this category where co-education schooling is concerned. For these groups public single-sex schooling is viewed as beneficial.

It is on the basis of vulnerability that proponents of single sex education continue to argue the viability of such schooling within public education in the United States (Riordan, 1990), Australia (Annemaree, 2002) and even the United Kingdom where the more recent debate has bee dominated by studies on ways to raise boys’ achievement (Jackson, 2002) and there are some sound reasons for public single sex education.

There are strong opinions that single-sex schools can benefit the wider public especially from the perspective of democratic rights. Like Salomone (2003), Caplice (1994:325) contends that “to best achieve true equality of the sexes each must be free to pursue that educational track which best advances their intellectual, spiritual, physical and social well-being, whether that track be mixed or a same sex environment”. Single sex school becomes a method of education reform where gender segregated schooling meets the education needs and learning styles of certain groups. The method is even more necessary because the negative effects of sex differences peak in adolescence. Social class, race and gender exacerbate teenage turbulences among girls and boys which is what single-sex schools are claimed to counteract. For Salomone (2003) this brings diversity to public education and allows for some limited choice of schooling within public education. Also, having a choice provides vulnerable and marginalised groups the advantage that the wealthy are able to buy private single-sex education.
Although vulnerable groups tend to be at the core of these debates, there are other contentions with regard to public single-sex education and education reform. According to Riordan (1990) the single-sex education debate is about education reform, but when the central focus becomes an issue of girls’ education, then the debate overlooks the complexity of single gender reform in public education. Herr and Arms (2002:87) and Sanford and Blair (2002) illustrate how genuine reform can become trivialised when the focus becomes ‘improving’ the vulnerable groups. They contend that without deep-rooted reforms within the schools, expanded education opportunities and gender equity cannot be sustained yet this is the reason for the creation of single sex schools.

In a one-year study of one California public middle school, Herr and Arms (2002:87) observed that in “creating a single-gender school, gender equity and teacher education on gender issues were left unexamined as the school shifted its focus to one main goal: improving standardised test scores”. Sanford and Blair (2002) observed that even where access was secured and the schooling climate enabling and empowering, the contribution of single-sex schooling to gender equity remained markedly slow because the development and implementation of the right kind of policy that was required for gender inclusion to become a sustainable reality in schools. The two studies show that somewhere between satisfying scholars’ needs it is necessary that there is genuine gender reform, otherwise the ultimate goal of single-sex schooling becomes lost.

As already mentioned, these debates have links to single-sex education in Kenya. However, it is important to point out that unlike the United States, there are no complex legalities around the institutionalisation of public single-sex schooling in Kenya. Rather, single-sex education is encouraged as part and parcel of public education. It is even the hope of policy makers that it helps to revolutionise the much needed gender reform in education. This notwithstanding, loopholes in the legal framework restrict effective and lasting gender reform in education.

The Education Act and the Children’s Act of 2002 are the legal machinery that provide for education and protect scholars against sex-based bias and discrimination in education. However, both lack the executionary mechanisms to prosecute parents who do not send their children to school, yet this is a mechanism that is especially important for the benefits of free primary education to be fully utilised. They also lack the mechanisms to prosecute schools
and teachers who engage in gender biased discriminatory practices in school. This technicality is a drawback to genuine gender reform in education. It is the outcome of the Education Act of Kenya which is created out of a constitution that does not fully recognise that women’s democratic rights are equal to those of men in all spheres of life including social, cultural, political and economic realms (see 2.3). Though the Children’s Act of 2002 improves on this invisibility, in that it recognises education as a human right, the reality about education in Kenya is that it is gendered and in the face of complex socio-cultural realities legislation can be toothless. Ensuring that primary education is seen as a human right is one of the more formidable of the challenges to gender equity under the current constitution. At the level of secondary education the challenges of gender equity take other forms as the low transition rates from primary to secondary education show (see 3.2.1), a clear indication that the attainment of secondary education for all by 2015 sits on very shaky ground.

To conclude this section, it is important to point out where single-sex education fits in Kenya. The global movement for girls and women’s education, which falls under the aegis of EFA forums, seeks sustainable ways to increase levels of female access to education. As such, gender focused educational policies such as those recommended in the National Gender and Development Policy (RoK, 2000b) consider single-sex education as one such means. In Kenya, single-sex schools constitute about 15% of all public schools. Though few in number they are preferred especially for girls because retention is more or less guaranteed once access to the school is secured. At the secondary level, where single-sex education is common, education output and outcomes become the more important feature because there is the expectation that these returns are commensurate with the investment made on this type of education, which in Kenya is fee-paying. The section following examines single-sex education with respect to its overall benefits and advantages for girls.

### 3.5.1 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLING

Co-education may offer a more socially realistic environment in terms of adolescent girls’ preparedness for the future, but as I have argued in the previous section, single-sex girls’ schools are about giving girls a chance. An all girls’ school provides inclusivity in a gendered education environment and a future for women in societies with a gender imbalanced workforce within sectors that are important to the well-being of women.
Education has come a long way since the landmark study on sex differences by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974). Although the correlation they found between sex differences and cognitive abilities has since been challenged, it opened up debate including that on the advantages and disadvantages of single-sex/co-education. As regards which is the better kind of schooling, the debate is inconclusive but positive attributions continue to be made of single-sex girls’ schools. These include academic and personal achievement, freedom from gender stereotypes, leadership, improved confidence and self-esteem. As an academic environment, the single-sex school greatly strengthens female performance and participation in the classroom because “class level participation rates and leadership opportunities are suppressed for girls in co-educational settings” (Jimnez and Lockheed, 1989:135).

Seemingly, it is the environment rather than sex that contributes to the differences found in education. Longitudinal studies that have explored academic achievements have found that the social organisation of schooling has had some impact on achievement. The data findings are the same for large and small studies.

In their six year longitudinal study of over 270,000 students in 53 academic subjects Rowe, Turner and Lane (2001) compared single-sex and co-education schools and found that co-educational settings were limited in their capacity to accommodate the large differences in the cognitive, social and development growth rates of boys and girls aged 12 and 16. Their study agrees that single-sex schooling is beneficial for adolescent scholars.

A similar study in England by the National Foundation for Educational Research concluded that girls benefited more than boys from single-sex education. The study found that larger single-sex schools benefited their students more than smaller ones. However, the study recommended that public single-sex schools have at least 180 pupils in order to maximise academic performance (Spielhofer, O’Donnell, Benton, Schagen and Schagen, 2002).

The impact of co-education on academic well being is reported in Jackson and Smith (2000). An ten year study of an Australian secondary school and a two year study of an English found that co-education environments created social disadvantage for girls resulting in negative academic implications.
The findings of these studies resonate with those done earlier. A longitudinal study of a high school class of 1972 by Riordan (1993) found that women’s colleges had a strong and positive influence on educational and occupations achievement among other things.

These studies confirm that single gender as a social organisation benefits girls and positively influences their achievement. The findings in these longitudinal studies concur with the many others that have suggested that there are achievement advantages for female in single-sex schools. In the UK, studies include Shaw (1980) and in the US Tidball (1980), Marsh (1989), Riordan (1990) and Mael (1998). Others studies undertaken elsewhere include Jamaica (Hamilton, 1985), Hong Kong (Wong, Lam and Ho, 2002).

Other studies have also found correlation among single-sex education, freedom from gender stereotypes, leadership, improved confidence and self esteem.

According to Carpenter (1985) the absence of competitive classmates of the opposite sex creates learning environments that are free from gender stereotypes facilitating engagement that is free from peer pressure and negative competition from males. This kind of environment is critical in adolescence because of the tensions in sexuality and identity formation; it enables girls to build their self-esteem and self-confidence in a nurturing environment. When girls are allowed to develop their self-esteem, they are able to have higher educational aspirations, follow their goals and dreams, become leaders and, most importantly break away from the gender stereotypes in their societies that hold them back (Lee and Bryk, 1986:381; Schneider and Coutts, 1982). Kenway and Willis (1990) claim that single-sex education makes girls serious about their studies, promoting intellectual curiosity, assertiveness, and high self-esteem. Self-confidence and self-esteem are crucial personal qualities that enable girls to be positive about the future. In single-sex girls schools self-confidence and self-esteem also develop through interaction with female teachers who serve as role models for their students. Finn, Dulberg and Reis (1979: 496) argue that “the role of the female instructors and the absence of male role models and competition with boys may well enable girls to succeed and internalise a positive self-concept”. The presence of female role models makes girls perceive that women can hold power, are strong and confident individuals and leaders who can enter any occupational field, they choose.
In a study of single-sex colleges, Lee and Bryk (1986:381) found that the single-sex organisation of schooling had positive effects on students including “greater academic involvement, student involvement with faculty, verbal aggressiveness, intellectual self esteem and satisfaction with most aspects of college life” (ibid: 1986:381). For this particular study, the authors attributed the positive effects to a greater sense of identification brought about by a communal feeling when both students and faculty are of the same gender.

These studies done in the West are important because there no longitudinal studies comparing the impact of single-sex and mixed-sex education in Kenya. There are also no studies on the psychological impact of such schooling on girls. Nonetheless, the advantages of single-sex schooling are acknowledged in the few studies undertaken on gender and education in the eighties (Eshiwani, 1982; Tiwoli, 1986; Torongey, 1986; Wachanga, 1987) and also in the UNESCO Platform for Action Adopted by the Fifth Regional Conference on Women (1994:6). In addition, policy documents such as the recent Master Plan on Education and Training: 1997-2010 (RoK, 1998:81) recommend single-sex schooling for disadvantaged groups such as children in marginalised communities in the arid regions of the country. All the same, the document makes no mention of the impact these schools have an academic performance, even though it does recommend that more research be done on parental preference for single-sex and mixed schools and for day and boarding schools.

The few studies that have been conducted on single-sex schooling in Kenya are dated, because they do not cater for the issues emerging in the 8-4-4 system. All the same, they do point out the benefits of single-sex schools in relation to conducive learning environments. None, however, investigates combined factors of educational choice and schooling experiences, which is what this study attempts to do.

This study examines girls’ educational experiences, subject choices, career aspirations and higher education because the objective of single-sex schools is to facilitate expanded educational opportunities.

According to Riordan (2002:18), “there are at least a dozen theoretical rationales that provide support for contention that single-sex girls’ schools are more effective academically and developmentally, especially for minorities and at-risk students”. They include (ibid.19):
the diminished strength of youth culture values;
• a greater degree of social control;
• a reduction of sex differences in curriculum and opportunities;
• a reduction of sex bias in teacher-student interaction;
• a reduction of sex stereotypes in peer interaction;
• the provision of a greater number of leadership opportunities;
• pro-academic parents and student choice;
• smaller school size;
• a core curriculum emphasising academic subjects taken by all students;
• positive relationships among teachers, parents and students that lead to a shared value community with an emphasis on academics;
• and finally active and constructivist teaching and learning.

Gender and education on the sub-Saharan African continent is markedly gendered and differently experienced by girls as there are many factors that affect girls in their education. Girls’ education is characterised by threats on their sexuality (Lloyd et al., 1998), negative attitudes and influences revolving around family, community and social class (Swainson, 1995), lack of educational resources and trained teachers (King and Hill, 1993), social-economic problems of lack of school and binding domestic duties (Brock and Cammish, 1997). Lloyd, Mensch and Clark (1998) and Mensch, Clark, Lloyd and Erulkar (1999) in their studies in Kenya reveal a ‘hidden’ curriculum that negatively affects girls’ learning and survival in primary school.

The single-sex boarding school mitigates such factors. It ensures survival, and gives girls the stability to translate schooling experiences into meaningful education outcomes. This is what Kenyan parents go for in single-sex schools (Okwemba, 2001). However, it is important to note that while single-sex boarding schools often manage to eliminate the more overt threats to girls’ education, there are less obvious threats to girls’ education and these have greater impact because they are hidden and less likely to be questioned or challenged. They are found in the school culture, the curriculum, and in classroom and teaching practices.

Literature on boarding schools also states that this social organisation helps to create this advantage. A study of more than 2,700 high school students and adults interviewed over a course of 16 months conducted by the Association of Boarding Schools (The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS), 2005) concludes the following about boarding schools:

Contemporary boarding schools produce a diverse body of motivated and well rounded students who study and live in supportive, inclusive academic communities where they learn about independence and responsibility – traditional values that help them achieve
success at higher rates than private and public school students – in the classroom and beyond.

So far, I have reviewed some on the literature of single-sex education and presented the reasons why single-sex education mitigates negative gender impacts on girls’ education. The studies reviewed show that single-sex education has more pronounced benefits on girls than on boys with regard to academic achievement, self-esteem and confidence and the elimination of gender stereotypes. In the next section, I undertake a similar review and examine career choice and higher education within the context of single-sex schooling.

3.5.2 THE SINGLE-SEX SCHOOL AND EDUCATION ADVANTAGES

The single-sex school environment inspires girls into less stereotyped ideas of what they can and cannot do (West and Hunter 1993; Stables, 1990; Lee and Bryk, 1986). Without boys gender tensions are also lessened which enables girls to channel their focus to academic studies. This kind of environment is also claimed to encourage girls to step out of gender stereotypes educational choices and to pursue ‘non feminine’ educational courses.

In Western countries, for instance the UK, the differences between male and female participation in science and mathematics is closing. In the nineties, equal numbers of girls and boys took GCSE mathematics (Shaw, 1995). In a commentary on gender equity developments in the UK, Shaw states that “the work that the feminists of the 1970’s began is now essentially complete” (ibid., 1995:1). Indeed, the work is complete because in the first decade of the new millennium British girls surpass their male counterparts in maths and science (Francis, 2000).

In single-sex schools, girls take ‘male’ subjects (Archer and Macrae, 1991; Whitehead, 1996) and studies have found girls achieve well in these subjects (Younger and Warrington 1996; Francis, 2000; Jackson, 2002). This is because single-sex schools are able to organise curriculum around core subjects, which are taken by all students (Riordan, 2002:19).

With regard to other education output, girls who attend single-sex girls’ schools are more likely to take college majors in sex integrated fields such as science and engineering (Thompson, 2003). The choice of ‘male’ subjects in secondary school and in higher
education has been linked to the feminist attitudes encouraged in single-sex girls’ schools (Weiner 1994:74).

Several studies in Africa have explored single-sex schooling and concurred with Riordan (1990) on the benefits with respect to school subjects. Biraimah’s (1980:196) case study on the impact of Western schools on Togolese girls’ expectations explored the impact of the school environment on girls and found that Western education was able to elevate the ‘status’ of women by undermining traditional female patterns of authority and power. She also found that formal Western schooling did not influence or alter the women’s role expectations at all. (ibid.196). Her study raised important issues with respect to single-sex education, which in Kenya is predominantly a Western education and one that enjoys an elevated status as far as schooling for girls is concerned. Biraimah pointed to the fact that for women in the Third World role expectations could take either of two courses. Women because of their education would safeguard their traditional roles and expectations to serve to their advantage or else a Western education would be elevated and be allowed to subsume these role and expectations forcing women to seek other ways from which to identify themselves. Biraimah highlighted the existence of important expressions of self that are possible points of conflict within girls as they go about their education.

The effect of single-sex schools on girls’ education is reported by Eshiwani (1982). He found that Kenyan girls tended to have higher educational aspirations and improved performance levels in science and mathematics when they attend all girls’ schools. His study, which was among the first on single-sex schooling in Kenya, bolstered the popularity of these schools.

In a study on the effects of single-sex schooling on Nigerian adolescents, Lee and Lockheed (1990) found a correlation between the social organisation of single-sex schools and subject perceptions. Their empirical findings showed that being in a single-sex school positively impacted on girls’ academic achievement in mathematics more than it did on boys in single-sex schools. They linked the less gender stereotypical views that girls had of mathematics to the single-sex schooling (ibid.229).

In a similar study, Ifelunni (1997) compared academic performance and found quality academic performance in maths and science in single-sex schools when compared to mixed schools. This study complements findings by Lee and Lockheed (1990).
Findings by Morrell (2002) on South Africa resonant with Kenya. South Africa, has had a long history of single-sex education, however the schools are elitist serving predominantly the minority white population. The need for single-sex schools has been prominent on the agenda of the Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) for the following reasons. Developing excellence in girls education, providing security for girls from harassment and violence and the provision of affirmative programme designed to equip girls with a high level of consciousness about women’s’ and girl rights.

In the previous chapter, I argue that studies on gender and education in Kenya tend to focus on school enrolment. However, studies on education choices (see Ndunda and Munby, 1991, Obonyo, 1991; Kibera, 1993) and gender differences in academic achievement in science and mathematics (see Eshiwani, 1982; Tiwoli, 1986; Torongey, 1986; Wachanga, 1987) commonly found that single-sex schools in Kenya have positive impact on education in general.

Other studies point out a link between school quality and female participation in undergraduate programmes. A study of undergraduate students attending three public universities in Kenya found that the quality of secondary school education that women received correlated to the kinds of courses they enrolled for at university (Ominde, 1999). The links indicated that single-sex education offered girls better prospects for university education.

Other studies, though less directly related to single-sex schooling are important to girls’ education as whole. An empirical analysis of public examination results by Wassanga (1997) and Makau (1994) alludes to negative attitudes towards non-traditional subjects. Neither agency nor the role of the school in shaping educational perceptions is interrogated in the two studies. Obura (1991) in a study on primary school textbooks and Kitetu (1998) on the social discourses in mixed sex science classrooms both found that text books and classroom talk that belittled or underrated women had a negative impact on learning and on students’ attitudes towards certain school subjects. The two studies revealed that the gendered portrayal of women attacks self-confidence and denigrates the development of a positive self-esteem.

Still, single-sex schools like any other are not immune to a negative gender impact.
In their book *Schooling in Capitalist America* Bowles and Gintis (1979) point out that schooling has other dimensions to it besides what is evident in school policy, school curriculum, physical and learning facilities. They describe schooling as covert educational processes that include unintended consequences. This is noted in this study even as the advantages of single-sex schooling and the positive effect it has on girls’ education are examined. This is because social and cultural context pervade even the most protected schooling environments, in any case, as already discussed in Chapter 2, education in Kenya has had a history of social cultural contestation.

Now, concerning academic achievement, career choice and higher education single-sex schools exemplify not only the attainment of gender equity but also expanded education opportunities. Judging from what is evident of female enrolment in secondary education and academic performance in all girls’ schools in Murang’a district, the following questions need to be asked:

- why don’t girls attending all girls schools in Murang’a district excel in mathematics and science subjects?
- why is admission in public universities low among girls from these schools?

My contention is that negative social influences particularly gender related permeate single-sex schools. However, the impact is often de-linked from such schools because there is an apparent homogeneity about them, which in reality is false because it just veils the threats to, and assumptions about the group.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION: THE INTRICACIES OF CONTEXT

In Chapter 2, I discussed the development and growth of education in Kenya and pointed out that, despite phenomenal growth, education in Kenya serves a functionalist purpose. I argued there was a lack of serious initiatives to promote education equality and so the legacy of colonial African education combined with the impact of social stratification have prevailed over education which is why inequalities have thrived.

I took this discussion further in Chapter 3 and examined education from the perspective of economic development in order to establish the nature of education inequalities in Kenya. I used WID, WAD and GAD feminism theory as a lens to explore how women’s development
is framed. I also explore three key feminism theories on education for ways to approach the nuances in education inequality in girls’ education. I established that is a symbiotic relationship between education and economic development. However, in practice, education appears not to serve the economic needs for development.

In this chapter, one of my arguments in this study is that post-primary education for women is crucial to economic development and female participation in waged employment. I therefore argue that foregrounding women’s experience in relation to their social context is critical to understanding what goes on in their lives. This theoretical position referred to as “material feminism” (Weiner, 1994:21) is the multidimensional fusion of feminisms whose relevance to education is as follows:

… category of feminist scholarship which emphasis the shifting notions of womanhood and also its dialectical relationship to other social formations such as class, family, relation … that is one which contends that all human action, including that of women, is the consequence of specific cultural, economic and social conditions and influences.

It describes the ways in which education is interwoven and inseparable from the broader social, economic and historical context, and the impact that has on schooling experiences. Material feminism recognises that the social world is not value-free (Gibson, 1986).

It is a perspective that allows for the examination of the ideologies and values that girls hold, providing some understanding of how they experience and respond to the tensions that exist in their education. These tensions are fairly well documented in the West but the case is not the same for Kenya where research on girls’ education fails to go beyond numbers.

Finally, Professor Amina Mama, a gender activist and scholar describes feminism as a “positive … movement based term” which “signals a refusal of oppression – internal, external, psychological and emotional, social-economic, political and philosophical” (Salo, 2001: 59). Mama, does not describe herself as a feminist even though it is implied when she identifies herself as one among a “community of radical women” (ibid.) that uphold a brand of feminism that is primarily concerned with gender roles and gender relations within public and private spheres. Mama’s perspective is shared by other Third World feminists like Mohanty (1991), Sow (1999) and Assie-Lumumba (1999b). It is a perspective that embraces the fact that such knowledge is framed within a social location. It calls for the analysis of how the history and developments of an education system structure and institutionalise gendered frames within education and it takes cognisance of the context, the locality or social location.
In this study, I consider the everyday overt and covert experiences that culminate in the patterns evident in girls’ education as being integral to the education choices they make. Whether they originate from school, home or from within the girl herself, they constitute the lived world that provides the basis for the choices that girls make. From this perspective, I consider the personal narratives of these experiences imperative to the study. Even more important is the lens used to interpret these stories.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1  INTRODUCTION

Given the ‘power’ in statistics, it was my concern to document methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative generating methods so that the former interrogates the latter to bring out the processes that lead to education choices; specifically school subject choices, higher education preferences and career aspirations. This chapter discusses the rationale for the choice and use of the interpretive paradigm. The content of the chapter begins with a review of positivist and post positivist eras (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), it then moves on to naturalistic inquiry and makes a case for the interpretive case study. Data collection is discussed with all five methods described at length; likewise, data analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with the realities of fieldwork practice and ethics in educational research.

4.2  CONCEPTUALISING RESEARCH INQUIRY

Simply put, research is a way of going about finding answers to a question. Throughout our lives we consciously or unconsciously undertake some measure of research and while the reasons and motivation vary, all research is inquiry. It is an investigative mechanism or process to find out what one does not know.

Since research is about making sense of real world human problems and researchers are motivated by either one or more of the following: solving problems, predicting effects, obtaining results and concern for actionable factors, developing and testing programmes, interventions, and services then resolving human problems requires some form of research inquiry (Robson, 1993:11).

4.2.1  INQUIRY FOR WHAT?

Our world tends to be structured and compartmentalised, however, research inquiry can be approached variously depending on whether it investigates phenomenon in the natural or the social world.
According to Merriam (2001) research methodology and techniques are human inventions structured to enable inquiry. They are tools for navigation, which facilitate investigation into a phenomenon. Such investigation duly leads to some understanding of the phenomenon through experiencing, measuring or capturing its reality. All the same, the way in which a researcher will engage with such the phenomenon will depend on the methodology chosen. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000:164), “methodology is inevitably interwoven with and emerges from the nature of a particular discipline and particular perspective”. In other words, both discipline and the nature of research converge upon the choice of research methodology and techniques of inquiry.

Having shown that inquiry is not undertaken in isolation, it is necessary to examine briefly the development of research inquiry and the factors and features which determine the different approaches.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:14) place the modes of inquiry into three paradigm eras: the pre-positivist, the positivist and the post positivist. Each period has had its unique set of “basic beliefs” or “metaphysical principles” which adherents believe in and act on. “Quantitative” and “qualitative” research or approaches are terms which have repeatedly been used to refer to research inquiry that rests within the empiricist/positivist tradition and interpretivist/naturalistic inquiry respectively (Creswell, 1994).

**4.2.1.1 Perspectives into inquiry: Positivist, post-positivist and naturalistic eras**

Naturalistic inquiry is linked to post-positivism, which parted ways with positivism as a scientific method of inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:28-29). All three are foundations from which sense is made of reality. Post-positivism and naturalistic inquiry represent different ways of thinking about research, which have developed alongside the social science discipline. They provide a foundation, general perspective or way of breaking down the complexity of the real world (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:14). Patton (1990:36) likens a foundation to a framework or a strategy. A “strategy provides basic direction. It permits seemingly isolated tasks and activities to fit together; it moves separate efforts toward a common and integrated purpose”.

Empiricist/positivist tradition and interpretivist/naturalistic inquiry are frameworks of inquiry. However, there is a distinction between them that lies in the nature of reality (ontology), the
relationship of the knower to the known (epistemology), the possibility of generalisation, the possibility of causal linkages and the role of values (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:37). Ontology, epistemology and values are significant to this research because although education in Kenya is equal for both girls and boys, equity is a reality that is experienced differently because education and schooling is situated within a context where social, economic and cultural factors define and shape reality. How this reality is experienced, conceived and known varies because of gender, location, beliefs, etc.

Schwandt (1997:90) refers to ontology as metaphysics. He defines it as “the study of reality, of being, of the real nature of whatever is, of first principles”. He defines epistemology as “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (1997:39). Ontology and epistemology are the foundations on which the choice of the research design is made. The former reveals how a researcher views reality, which in turn determines the researcher’s position in relation to knowledge about that reality. The knowledge that is derived about reality is a researcher’s epistemological position about which Lincoln and Guba (1985:37) state the following:

There are multiple constructed realities that can only be studied only holistically; inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers) so that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes although some level of understanding (verstehen) can be achieved.

In this study, I perceive the realities in education as interwoven and inseparable from broader political, psychological and social experiences. This is shaped by the fact that I am a ‘teacher researcher’. In developing countries proponents of teacher research argue that the position of teacher researcher improves teachers’ professional development because it is in a sense a vantage point that provided a critical examination and therefore one that is both relevant and useful to teaching realities and experiences (Crossley and Vulliamy, 1997:17). According to Flyvbjerg (2004), undertaking case study research is an especially beneficial learning process that develops the skills needed to become a good researcher. The case study, as pointed out later in this chapter, is important within education research and it is the way to go if teachers are to become the hallmark of education research in developing countries.

Given my own experiences of education, I am aware that understanding of phenomena best occurs where study is sustained. In this regard, I concede with Lincoln and Guba (1985) that the relationship of the knower to the known interacts and that the knower and the known are
inseparable. The epistemological and ontological considerations that inform this research design take into account that this study explores a lived world.

4.2.1.2 Cognition frameworks: choosing a research paradigm

A paradigm is a cognition framework that is based on a philosophical positioning. The term “research paradigm” is associated with Kuhn (1962) and is also known as methodology (Creswell, 1998) or strategy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Schwandt (1997) defines it as a “disciplinary matrix” because it constitutes the commitments, beliefs, values, methods and outlooks shared across a discipline.

The ‘how’ in research inquiry is a matter of philosophical positioning that characterises the paradigm debate and differentiates paradigms. Because of positioning there tends to be a distinct demarcation between the positivist and post-positivist philosophies. The post-positivist is better suited to natural setting, as the mode of inquiry uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic and the research itself is emergent rather than tightly pre-figured (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000a; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This multidimensional perspective to inquiry is responsible for the controversies around post positivism (see Lincoln and Guba, 2000). There is an array of terminology describe research inquiry and developments in the post positivist era: see debates in Lincoln and Guba (1985) for naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1994 and 2000) for paradigmatic controversies; Creswell (1998) for research traditions; Eisner and Peshkin (1990), Denzin and Lincoln (2000a) for qualitative research; Creswell (2003) for the mixed methods research designs. There is indeed a “plethora of terms” as Lather (1991:12) aptly refers to it that warrants examination.

Positivism or empiricist inquiry originated with the Vienna Circle of Logical Positivists (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:19). It is associated with natural science. Positivism has had a major impact in reforming the scientific method and its tenets found their way into the study of social life (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 200). Positivism holds the worldview that reality is objective and external, that “all scientific knowledge is based on empirically observable impressions, the latter is also empirically testable and verifiable” (Synman, 1993:2). In positivist inquiry a researcher becomes detached from reality, a feature that is widely regarded as reliable and legitimate as a means to knowledge claims.
Research has developed through the eras (see section 4.2.1.1) and the philosophical disengagement with phenomena, instrumental reasoning and causal explanations for all aspects of phenomena have been contested (see for example Lincoln and Guba (1985). The underlying implications are that positivistic research inquiry is merely one of the two broad approaches that can be used to make research inquiry. In as far as educational research is concerned this is an important paradigm shift.

The truth about reality in educational contexts is that while it may be observable, testable and verifiable the variables which intersect education and schooling are both numerous and complex. In this study, I move beyond matters of education access and parity. I therefore forsake the ‘objective’ worldview because the linearity in such a research design fails to capture the subtle forms that shape and influence female education (see section 3.5.1). Any form of detachment would also alienate the various in and out of school experiences that shape education choice. This awareness influences my research design decisions.

Assuming that positivism and naturalistic inquiry fall on either end of the ‘paradigm continuum’, then it is important to recognise that the difference between the two depends on whether or not a researcher adopts a transitive or intransitive approach to the inquiry. This decision determines whether research is undertaken from a ‘quantitative’ or ‘qualitative’ standpoint.

This study adopts a qualitative standpoint. A qualitative standpoint recognises that inquiry is bound by values and that a relationship exists between the knower and the known. The interpretive paradigm falls into this description.

In terms of definition, interpretivist research is an inquiry into a social world that “people actively construct” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:19-22). This mode of inquiry does not assume that people are “cultural dopes or passive dolls of positivism” (ibid.). Rather, interpretivist research recognises and attends to issues in a real and lived world where situations are fluid and changing rather then fixed, where events and behaviour evolve over time and are richly affected by context and are situated activities. Like the “naturalist inquiry” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:37), interpretive research inquires into a constructed rather than a controlled world. It is research which endeavours to bring visibility to research context through giving recognition to the fact that people are bound by context and that they occupy
spaces where they interact and engage. Like all naturalistic inquiry the interpretive paradigm is research into a “natural setting”. It has a naturalist ontology where “realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation of their context” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:39). This factor is pertinent to education research in developing countries because of contextual factors pointed out in Chapter 2 and 3 (see section 2.2 and 3.3) and to this study because girls’ worldview and knowledge (this includes that which informs education choices, preferences and aspirations) are derived from and constructed in the various social spaces that they occupy and engage with. As most qualitative research theorists might argue, “all types of qualitative research are based on the view that reality is constructed by the individual interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam (2001:6).

The term “qualitative research” is an all-embracing umbrella concept that interchangeably denotes naturalistic research, interpretive research, field study, participant observation, inductive research, case study and ethnography (Merriam, 2001:5). It assumes that people are a product of their consciousness, where their world and them are one and that reality is multilayered and complex (Cohen et al., 2000:22). In qualitative research the subjective and the personal are acknowledged and so such research inquiry takes on a different form and uses different investigative apparatus.

This study has both wide scope and depth. The idea to go ‘wide and deep’ is necessitated by the issues under investigation: subject choices, higher education preferences and career aspirations. However, even though the study goes wide, the universality of findings is not relevant. Though such an argument might appear somewhat illogical and unsystematic, methodical procedures are followed to generate and to analyse data, which ensures that the inductions made are a systematic interpretation of the realities known to the girls under study. In other words, truth seeking and the generation of knowledge is drawn out of a context that is robust in data quality (Cohen et al., 2000:19-26).

4.3 INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section makes a case for interpretive research methodology (Cohen et al., 2000:3). It argues the appropriateness of the choice within gender in a rural context (Murang’a district). It discusses the relevance of interpretive research in the investigation of girls subject choices,
higher education preferences and career aspirations within the context of single-sex secondary education in the district.

4.3.1 A CASE FOR RESEARCH ON FAMILIAR GROUND

According to Mouly cited in Cohen et al., (2000:3), the means by which people set out to come to grips with their environment and to understand the nature of the phenomena may be classified into three broad categories: experience, reasoning and research. The three are hardly independent or mutually exclusive of each other, rather they overlap and complement one another.

Girls’ educational experiences, choice of subject, higher education preferences and career choices aspirations are familiar terrain in educational research. The three are associated with education output and outcomes and often constitute variables used to test a hypothesis.

This study is designed differently from the outset. It is not hypotheses testing because it is aware that gender differentiates education opportunities in ways more than just classroom experiences (see Gaidzanwa, 1999). It endeavours to understand the constructions girls make of schooling and the processes leading to their education choices rather than stopping at the identification of gender-related differentiation. Bringing out the patterns of choice deepens our understanding of the relationship between education access, output and outcomes in secondary education in Kenya. Making meaning of these patterns is also important because all education choices in Kenya are bound by an education system that is examination-oriented and highly competitive.

If education is a process and the school is a lived experience (Merriam, 2001:4) then understanding the meaning of the process or experiences constitutes knowledge. As I have indicated already, interpretive research is grounded in the reality of the phenomena. Taken that girls’ educational choices culminate from a variety of experiences that are related to immediate and broader schooling experiences then the value of the selected research design lies in the fact that it facilitates entry into the lived world of schooling thus enabling meaning to be made of all school-related experiences. This research design is also useful in that it is able to locate where and how various educational realities intersect girls’ education as they pertain to gender in education policy. In other words, the interpretive research design is able
to interrogate the procedural and regulative policies intended to safeguard gender equity in education. What happens in school and why and how girls consolidate and act upon the various schooling experiences are some of the questions which interpretive research answers in this study. Merriam (2001:1) observes that “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education.”

4.3.2 MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOLING THROUGH INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY

There are a host of education inequalities whose manifestation becomes of concern when the quality of education outcomes is scrutinised. The reasons underlying differentiation are also not always recognisable even though it is understood that lived experiences are socially constructed. It is therefore of fundamental importance that this study brings understanding of the perceptions and value-creating processes in girls’ education as well as how such girls function in the course of their schooling and choice-making experiences.

It is worth noting that the interpretive paradigm recognises that the social world is not value-free (Gibson, 1986) and that it offers an investigative framework, which emphasises the qualities of persons, places and events and the processes of making meanings (Creswell, 2003; Cohen et al., 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000a; Berg, 1998; LeCompte, Millory and Preissle, 1992). This notion is linked to social constructivism (Creswell 2003:8) and is similarly noted in Crotty (1998) and Neuman (2000). Recent work by Lincoln and Guba (2000) also identify interpretivism as an alternative way of making knowledge claims in a value laden social world.

The interpretive paradigm endears itself to exploration and in this study it facilitates the examination of ideologies and values, providing insight into what girls uphold, how they experience and respond to the tensions that exist in the course of their education. At the same time, the interpretive paradigm provides a means with which to analyse girls’ education as an equity concern with feminist underpinnings (Whyte, Deem, Kant and Cruickshank, 1985; Kenway and Willis, 1990; Gilbert and Taylor, 1991). For this particular reason, the study emerges with qualitative elements, namely descriptions and characteristics of things, concepts and symbols (Creswell, 2003; Cohen et al., 2000). While these are features derived from research subjects, it is important to note that the researcher’s epistemological and ontological
position was essential to the meaning making process. The study itself is inductive. It is claimed to be strong on reality with focus that is on specific situations or people, the emphasis is also on words rather than numbers (Maxwell, 1996:17). Inductive approaches to inquiry are closely aligned to a researcher’s subjective epistemological and ontological outlook. In this study I take an active role in the research and in many respects the “data are mediated through this human instrument” (Merriam, 2001:7).

At this point it is important to point out that there are gains from approaching this study from this position.

My epistemological position cannot be described as neutral. I am both conversant with and well informed about girls’ education. In this study, personal experience is used to facilitate a conscious or even purposed engagement with the girls’ social and education realities. The choice of a research paradigm ought to be resolved by what Cohen et al., (2000:121) refer to as a “fitness for purpose”. In other words, among other things, personal experience is valuable to in research. Cohen et al., (ibid.) argue that an individually accumulated body of knowledge and skills derived from encounters and acquaintances with facts and events in any environment is useful in problem-solving situations. Having been a high school teacher, I have accumulated vast amounts of ‘knowledge’ on girls’ education. Whilst there are advantages to familiarity, I remain aware of the delicate balance that exists between using such experiences as a basis for questioning and using them presumptuously to generate knowledge.

I heed the caution of Cohen et al., (2000) that accounting for one’s personal experience must be done honestly, by examining one’s own orientation to the basic tenets about the research, the purpose for doing the research and the type of knowledge that is to be produced because of rather than in spite of that experience. I also bear in mind that my experience and familiarity with girls’ education does not replace the tools of investigation, neither is it allowed to undermine the authenticity of data collection and data analysis processes.

I am also aware that besides the acquisition of knowledge the school is a place of social and psychological development and that the nature of such development can be either enriching or devastating. Throughout their various schooling experiences, girls collect, nurture and even pass on to one another perceptions and values. These experiences have far-reaching
consequences on girls more particularly in as far as their educational choices are concerned. This psychosocial aspect to schooling can be linked to gender-related research that seeks to build a critical consciousness. Whether or not it is aligned to feminism remains unimportant, however, it is known that education structures pattern in women’s lives so that the type of education that they receive influences the work and the economic rewards available to them later in life (Ollenburger and Moore, 1992:104). Seen from this point of view then it becomes important to develop an understanding of how gender and other social factors intersect on girls’ education.

As I have stated earlier, this study is an interpretive study of girls’ education choices. It does not seek to make gender comparisons. In fact for Murang’a district, gender comparisons would merely hide the gendered differences that are masked by the gender equal secondary school enrolment statistics.

In order to gain more in-depth understanding, ‘measuring’ the degree of value is but one way of determining what meaning is made of schooling experiences even though it is to some extent still an inadequate representation of education realities because inequalities within education compound schooling differently.

With the interpretive paradigm it is possible to raise questions that help in addressing these complexities:

- Can educational and schooling experiences be accounted for in terms of the way they structure and shape educational choices?
- What perceptions and values are generated through the educational and schooling processes?
- In what ways do the perceptions and values generated through schooling manifest in girls’ choices of school subjects, higher education and career aspirations?

The foregoing discussion alludes to the challenges of paradigmatic choices. Here I demonstrate the fine line that exists between an incisive study of female subjects, i.e. one which uses women’s experiences as the basis of analysis and feminist research, that is research that would normally take a critical stance and have a consciousness raising agenda (Olesen, 2000; McKay and Romm, 1992:342). In this study, the question is: does the
interpretive paradigm make this study any less valuable in terms of the outcomes known of feminist studies? I think not. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000a), a qualitative inquiry can draw upon and utilize a variety of methods, approaches and strategies. In this study, reference to schooling experiences calls for self-reflection. As such, though the study might not have an overt emancipatory agenda, the participatory engagements in which students and teachers initiate thought processes can be carried forward. McKay and Romm (1992:342) points out that when research focuses on the situation and experiences of women in society whether or not consciousness-raising is articulated as a research agenda, there ought to be intentional sensitivity, especially through the choice of methodology and the methods used. If this research were labelled a ‘feminist study’, it might draw attention to a standpoint, but the label alone remains ineffective if there is no sensitivity to the issues in the study. With regard to what this study is and what it is not, I am of the same view as Eichler as cited by Olesen (2000:158). She states simply that the point about good qualitative feminist research is women’s visibility and presence:

Whatever the qualitative research style, and whether or not self-consciously defined as feminist, these many voices share the outlook that it is important to center and make problematic women’s diverse situations and the institutions and the frames that influence those situations, and then to refer the examination of that problematic to theoretical, policy, or action frameworks in the interest of realising social justice for women.

Like Harding (1987a and b) who has argued the importance of using women’s research as the basis of analysis in research undertaken on women, Olesen (2000:160) argues that the critical point about research on women is in the unframing of the male-oriented and male influenced frameworks, which have long been the only perspective used in interpretive research. The question “in whose interest, by sex, race and class has knowledge been granted?” posed by Lather (1991:11) reminds one that research is about taking a position. If gender is at the centre of inquiry then it is fitting to flag a feminist position. However, the more critical question that this study wishes to respond to is ‘about whom’ and ‘for whom’ is this research about, rather than the label ‘feminist study’ much as it be may warranted.

Still, I hasten to add that feminist theories undergird the study but that alone does not make it feminist research. What the study does is engage with girls and accord them visibility. In so doing, the research delivers a particular story about girls’ secondary education i.e. ‘her story’. It attempts to replace the male-centred perspective with a female-centred one, challenging those that have dominated sociological research (Maynard, 1994:58). The study borrows
from Stephens (1998) whose study on girls’ education in Ghana uses life histories and the actual experiences of women and girls, to draw out interrelating domains of home, economy and school.

4.3.2.1 The interpretivist lens on girls’ education in Kenya
This section focuses on the value of a critical interpretive study within the Kenyan context where research on girls’ education tends to be dominantly in the form of positivist inquiry.

In Kenya there are studies that have interrogated education output and outcomes in depth. A few have attempted to make a link between education output, education outcomes and schooling experiences. However, none make this inquiry from an interpretive perspective. In other words, none of the studies have sought to understand the meaning and value attached to the schooling experiences and educational processes, and in particular those that lead to varied choices, preferences and aspirations.

A landmark study by Eshiwani (1982) is one such example. It provides ‘facts’ about the gendered state of science and mathematics education at secondary level. Beyond making attitudinal attributions, it does not attend to the underlying reasons any depth. Given that attitudes are borne out of the intricacies of a context, the study is rather superficial in its examination of the gendered state of secondary education. Like most gender-comparative studies undertaken in Kenya, Eshiwani’s study uses the survey method. The male gender is used as the ‘standard’, surreptitiously.

Literature on gender and education in sub-Saharan Africa continues to link the education advantage to males. As such, when the male gender is the ‘standard’ measure those features that are unique to girls’ education and which cause their schooling experiences to be different from those of boys are reduced in importance or even lost in gender comparative statistics. Whilst positivistic inquiry into gender in education does have a value in that it illuminates the magnitude of the gender problem it fails to provide an in-depth understanding of how and why gender persistently affects girls. The studies discussed below, all of which have been undertaken in Kenya, support this argument further.
In my review of studies done in the area of ‘gender and education’ at the Kenyatta University, Nairobi, I found a reasonably good collection of projects and theses undertaken by past students taking diplomas (PGDE) and master’s degrees in education (Ominde, 1999; Kahinga, 1998; Juma, 1994; Kibera 1993; Obonyo, 1991; Kitivo, 1989; Wachanga, 1987; Torongey, 1986). Research topics ranged from gender issues in primary education to course preferences by gender at undergraduate level and even gender and career development in higher education. There were few doctoral theses on this subject. Of the three, I perused one study had been undertaken eighteen years ago and is of little relevance to the current 8-4-4 system. The second, a survey by Juma (1994), assessed determinants of female participation in primary education in the Kwale and Taita-Taveta districts in Kenya. The third, an ex post facto research by Kibera (1993) assessed the effects of vocational and agriculture oriented curriculum on students in the Kiambu, Kajiado and Machakos districts.

In all three doctoral and master’s studies, the research designs were underdeveloped, even for empiricist research. The survey was the key method used in places where other methods would have been more appropriate in eliciting the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of gender within education (see for example Ominde, 1999; Kahinga, 1998; Juma, 1994; Obonyo, 1991; Kitivo, 1989; Wachanga, 1987; Torongey, 1986). Sampling procedures were not indicated or were unclear. Data that should have been presented as descriptive or non-parametric statistics was ‘counted’ quantified as inferential statistics in an endeavour to fit in with empiricist research methodology, which in Kenyan educational research is perceived, as the only legitimate way of doing research.

Obonyo (1991), Kitivo (1989) and Torongey (1986) framed their research within a positivist inquiry, which was clearly an obstacle to research depth. Their choice of a survey left the research questions inadequately addressed. Typical to the paradigm Kahinga (1998), Juma (1994), and Torongey (1986) relied heavily on statistical tabulation yet their research objectives sought to understand girls and science education. The case was the same for a study on women’s development by Juma (1994). Amongst the case studies, not one provided a profile of the research sites.

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7 Kenyatta University was first established as a College of Education and constituent college of Nairobi University. It later became a fully-fledged university but it maintained its focus on Education. Since 1990 it has expanded its faculties and currently offers a range of humanity-based courses. However, it still has the biggest education faculty of all the universities in the country. A significant percentage of education research is still done at Kenyatta.
A survey by Wachanga (1987) on the learning of chemistry among girls in mixed schools wound up its conclusions by comparing them with boys! Crossley and Vulliamy (1997:13) point out that qualitative research in education has a special potential in developing countries for various historical and cultural reasons. To date research in education has been dominated by positivist strategies and for obvious reasons. According to Berg (1998:2) “quantitative orientations are often given more respect”. In the case of educational research in Kenya, the right questions are being asked, however, the research methodologies are inappropriate for the complex issues at hand.

As stated earlier, paradigms are human inventions and researchers need not become slaves to them. Rather, they should serve as a scaffold to enable investigations into what is around them. Patton (1990:38) decries a one-sided allegiance to the paradigms and speaks in favour of research design that is pragmatic. He argues that methodological flexibility and adaptability should take precedence over a positivist or a post-positivist stance.

Crossley and Vulliamy (1997:13) have identified the place of qualitative research in developing countries. They point out four ways in which it is relevant to educational research in such countries:

- The main strengths of qualitative research in education are its high ecological validity derived from research in natural settings; its appropriateness for the study of the processes of educational innovations, especially focusing on the unanticipated consequences of change; its emphasis upon the chalk face realities of schooling with studies of classroom processes and teachers’ and students’ perspectives; its ability to probe the policy/practice interface and thus inform policy makers; and its usefulness in supplementing quantitative research by adding depth to breadth, by acting as preliminary to the design of large scale surveys and by interpreting the patterns found in correlational research.

Given the importance of qualitative research to education in developing countries, it makes sense to situate this study within the context of women’s development (see section 3.4 for details). It has been pointed out that in developing countries the realities of everyday schooling contexts tend to be neglected with preference given to research on systems perspectives (Crossley and Vulliamy, 1997:14). In developing countries, systems perspective research on education tends to be lodged in the positivistic paradigm primarily because of funding obligations. For this reason, the complex realities and nuances of gender within education tend to become lost. Given that education is integral to the development of women
In developing countries, the choice of qualitative research is made because of its capacity to advance the women’s cause once the factors that disenfranchise become better understood. Given the need to improve female access, survival, output and output in education, it becomes important to consider the contribution that a research paradigm makes to the addition of knowledge on girls’ education and women in general.

In this study, the philosophical stance that guides interpretivist research enables me to defy methodologies conceived as ‘standard’ in Kenya. There is critical engagement that permits an authentic presentation of the realities that frame girls schooling (see Chapter 5, 6 and 7 for details) because the research design is framed by feminism theories. Feminism theories facilitate the critical interpretation of educational and schooling realities. They enable me as the researcher to make an interrogation beyond face value. Such includes assumptions about gender equity in Murang’a district (see section 2.3.2.1). Doing so highlights the importance of extrapolating the impact that gender for instance has on girls’ education outside access and survival.

This study is also about revealing socially constructed knowledge claims. It is my contention in this study that education is not impervious to social location. Schooling experiences are a culmination of socialisation, and what happens in school cannot be delineated from the social construction of gender. Socialisation that denigrates women or places restrictions on their opportunities is not far removed from schooling and formation of identities that shape women. Given that schooling is more complex than is seen on the surface, researchers in developing countries need to move their focus beyond the imbalances in access, retention and academic achievement and delve deeper into the educational world of girls because it is only in questioning everyday school experiences that we will better understand why girls lag behind their male counterparts in their education.

4.4 CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

In the 1980s Lincoln and Guba (1985:360) made the following observations about the case study:

While the literature is replete with references to case studies and with examples of case study reports, there seems to be little agreement about what a case study is [emphasis mine].
Today, the case study is a widely used method. However within scholarly research definitions abound and debates are inconclusive as to whether the case study constitutes a research method or a methodological design (Stenhouse, 1988; Yin, 1994a; Stake, 1995). It is noted that the case study is used as a catch-all research category for anything that is not a survey or experiment and is not statistical in nature (Merriam, 1998). Summarising this confusion Winegardner (2003:1) states “there is both an imprecise understanding of the case study and absence of a universally accepted definition of it as a research typology”.

Renowned research theorist, Robert Yin (1994a:18) has observed that unlike other research strategies, in particular the survey and quasi-experimental research, the case study has yet to develop a comprehensive “catalogue” of research design. Yin perceives case study as a structured research design that adheres to reliability questions in the more or less similar ways to the survey. Though there is usefulness in such a catalogue, it is largely positivist in orientation and, considering that all researchers knowingly or unknowingly stand on some ground as far as research inquiry is concerned, one has to be critical about what the case study comprises.

Bassey (1999:69) has argued that there is no specific method of data collection or analysis with case study research. Rather, case study researchers ought to use whatever methods seem appropriate and practical to them. In fact, Bassey goes on to argue that the case study presents opportunity for creativity and adventure in as far as data collection and analysis are concerned. Both are valid arguments. However, within the interpretive paradigm, where the epistemological orientation matters and understanding processes and meaning making produces qualitative data, a ‘technicist’ approach to case study research would restrict the depth of study. This is not to say that consideration is not to be given to some methodical criterion. Since a methodical criterion is instructive in all good research, I settled for three case studies, whose purpose is to contribute an in-depth understanding of girls’ education in Murang’a district from three similarly structured, but different, schools.

In his book *Case Study Research In Educational Settings*, Michael Bassey (1999:5) makes a strong case for the place and role of case study research in educational settings. He argues that the study of “a singularity”, which he defines as “research into particular events rather then general events”, is a common choice among masters and doctoral students. The scope of case study research is normally small, hence, perhaps, its popularity. As a doctoral student
wearing a teacher’s hat and driven by feminism ideals my study is driven by two things. Though this research is motivated by the desire to conduct research within a ‘transformative framework’ which unmask gender equality statistics, the pragmatics of being a teacher researcher are significant. I take my cue from the fact that knowledge claims are concerned with applications and solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). Given the general state of want within girls’ education in Kenya, the case study is methodologically appropriate in elucidating insights into what happens in girls’ schools.

As pointed out in previous sections of this study (see section 2.3.2.1.1) one would align some high education outcomes commensurate with high female enrolment in Murang’a secondary schools. The outcomes are not commensurate but are low in quality especially among females and in science and technical subjects (see Appendix O). For this reason, female admission to the more competitive and prestigious courses at university is low in the district. It is also low in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican (see Appendix T). The study of these three schools is therefore important because it illuminates the intricacies of this high school enrolment/low education output paradox.

For the reasons discussed above, this study can be described as one that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994a:13), also known as “an empirical inquiry” (ibid.). From another perspective, the same study can also be defined as “a bounded system” (Stake, 1995:2). This simply means that the case study is an integrated system with working parts within itself. In other words, it has an existence that is bound by the time and the activity around which the actual study is undertaken.

The differences between the definitions of Yin (1994a) and Stake (1995) lie in epistemology. Yin (1994a:13) has an ‘out there’ worldview of reality and therefore a technical perception to the case study. For him, the case study “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points … relies on multiple sources of evidence … benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions” (ibid.). For Stake, the case study is an object of research or, in Merriam’s (2001:27) definition, “a unit of study” of a particular phenomenon at a particular time and place. Whilst the latter are important in defining the reality of phenomenon, consideration has been given to the compartmentalisation of case study research into either one of the two definitions.
The case study is context-dependent and close to real life situations. As multiple sites of incisive study, Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are on the one hand simply girls’ schools but on the other, they represent the lived world of education and schooling. This is an important factor in this study because each case explores the educational experiences that are real both at the level of the individual and at the level of the school. As an interpretive researcher I take an interest in and seek to understand this world and its complexities and here case study research permits the collection of nuanced views of reality (Flyvbjerg, 2004:422). In this respect the case study becomes a prime strategy for developing educational theory because it is able to illuminate theory and practice of educational policy. In addition, because all good case studies have an end product, the study purposes to help each school improve its educational practice (Bassey, 1999:3).

4.4.1 RESEARCHING GIRLS EDUCATION THROUGH THE CASE STUDY

According to Yin (1994:18) the research design is the logic that links data to be collected to research questions. This interpretive study draws its research design from Yin (1994) and Stake (1995) and its purpose with regard to generalisation from case study research from Bassey (1994).

The interpretive paradigm is strong on ‘reality’ so the ultimate goal of this study is to describe experiences, perceptions and values. As such, ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions dominate (Yin, 1994:6) giving the overall study the depth and quality of an “intrinsic” case study (Stake, 1995:3).

The purpose of the overall study is to make critical interpretations of girls’ educational experiences with regard to subject choices, higher education and career aspirations. Whilst similarities across the three schools can be expected (Yin 1994a:45) the individual cases are unique however similar schools might be (in this study of all girls schools), the educational experience is different, likewise the resultant choices and aspirations.

Notwithstanding, it is equally important to point out the importance of the context within which the research is undertaken. In Kenya persistent disparities of gender in female education are common and thus cross-case similarities found in this study (see Chapter 8) simply reflect the patterns and trends that would more than likely emerge in other schools.
outside of this study. For a study that is interested in advancing educational theory, applicability from case study research is in itself a challenge. However, “fuzzy generalisation” (Bassey, 1999:54) addresses this limitation in a way that is practical to educational research and the enhancement of educational practice. Fuzzy generalisation permits a researcher to reflect on commonalities in cases as replicable to other, which are not under investigation. It even allows a researcher to make hypotheses about the findings. In terms of the overall study, fuzzy generalisation deals with research finding in a robust way, because it caters for similar and/or contrasting results.

4.4.2 SAMPLING PROCEDURES

A sampling criterion is important both from a theoretical and research design perspective. According to LeCompte, Millory and Preissle (1992:69) it is necessary to create a list of the attributes essential to one’s study. In educational research Cohen et al., (2000:93) include the following four factors, which they argue, must precede decisions on sampling:

- Sample size;
- the representativeness and parameters of the sample;
- access to the sample; and
- the sampling strategy to be used.

In this study, the selection of different schools using school type, school category and school class/grade as a criterion was found to provide diversity of schooling.

The sampling procedure began with document analysis. According to Creswell (2003:186) documents “represent data that are thoughtful in that participants have given attention to compiling”. In education public and private records are useful as both provide historical and current information.

Documents according to Cohen et al., (2000:175) help to establish trends, patterns of change and even predictions of the future. I began this study by creating a sampling frame through document analysis of “readily available” (Oppenheim, 1992:39) material on single-sex girls’ schools in Murang’a district. I examined academic performance records specifically KCSE examination results (Murang’a District Education Office, 2000c; 2001b), student enrolment, subjects offered in the school curriculum, teacher qualifications and experience. I also
examined the quarterly reports for teacher turnover (Kenya, Murang’a District Education Office, 2001a; 2001b). The data provided me with the first criterion for selection of three schools for case study.

Other important documents examined include class registers, staff registers, letters of admission, school fees schedules, school governing body and the parents/teachers’ association membership. The documents provided the information on which I built the profiles of each case study. Data obtained from this analysis also served as a constituent part of methodological and data triangulation.

4.4.2.1 School type
At the onset of this study in 2002, Murang’a district had more girls than boys enrolled in secondary school. Of the 87 secondary schools in the district there were, 69 mixed-sex, 11 single-sex girls’ schools and 7 single-sex boys’ schools (Kenya, Murang’a District Education Office, 2001a). Because the overall purpose of this study was to give in-depth understanding into girls’ experiences of schooling, what they choose, prefer and aspire with regard to school subjects, higher education and careers, by design the study does not compare girls and boys. The research design is explicit on this even in the theory. The selection of single-sex girls’ as research sites is made on the basis of the social organisation and because of claims that they offer enabling environments to girls for academic achievement.

Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are obviously a purposive sample. Apart from being a “typicality” that serves a particular research objective (Cohen et al., 2000:103), the three had the following features which were central to the choice of school:

- size of the school, i.e. the student and staff population;
- academic history of the school i.e. examination national results;
- religious affiliation i.e. the church that sponsors the school; and
- location of the school.

Yellowwood is both the largest girls’ school in the district and the largest of the three in the sample (see details in section 5.1). It was selected for these reasons and because the school curriculum is broad. Fort Hall is a medium size single-sex girls’ school (see details in section 6.1). Dominican on the other hand is among the smallest single-sex girls’ schools in the
district (see details in section 7.1). School size is important because it breeds certain kinds of
dynamics inside the school.

The second criterion is academic history. Yellowwood’s top academic position in KCSE and
the wavering performance in Dominican and Fort Hall warrant their choice.

The history of education in Kenya shows that the church has played an active role in the
establishment of schools in the country (see section 2.2.1.2). For this reason, the third
criterion considers the affiliation of schools to a particular religious ordinance as important.
Among other factors school ethos, social and family dynamics are interwoven by religion
therefore religion is likely to play a vital role in girls’ educational experiences. The three
schools have affiliation to mainstream churches, Yellowwood and Dominican to the Anglican
and Fort Hall to the Catholic.

Murang’a district is predominantly rural and there has been conscious attempt to ensure that
the broader context in terms of social, cultural and economic dynamics has been captured
through the sample, through the selection of rural schools.

Finally, rural settings present their own challenges when selected as sites of research. The
geographical terrain in Murang’a district is difficult to negotiate and because of this,
pragmatic decisions had to be made. This district also has a poor road network so access to
schools located in the interior areas requires many hours on foot. For my research, schools
had to be accessible by means of public transport, as I had no car and did not want to take
security risks by walking long distances, sometimes during late evenings. In fact, with only
six months allotted to field study there was really no time available for me to traverse the
length and breadth of the district on foot. These reasons influenced my selection of a small
sample of located close to the main road. Yellowwood is located next to an all weather road
while Fort Hall and Dominican are three kilometres off the main road on a dirt road.

4.4.2.2 School category
National, provincial, district and harambee are administrative classifications for secondary
schools in Kenya. Yellowwood falls under ‘provincial’ and Fort Hall and Dominican under
‘district’ schools. The three were selected because the categories they fall into have historical
and social significance (see section 2.3.2.1.1; 5.3.2.1; 6.4.1 and 7.4.1).
4.4.2.3 School class/grade
My third selection criterion was grade. The research opted for study subjects in the third (FIII) and fourth (FIV) year of secondary education rather than the first (FI) and second (FII) year. Girls in FIII and FIV have made subject choices and are preparing for KCSE examinations. They also have a reasonably high level of academic maturity and are at a point in their secondary education where they are thinking about their future careers. The choice of girls in these two grades directly responded to the research questions.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION AND FIELDWORK PRACTICES
Three methods have been used in this study to facilitate systematic data gathering. They are descriptive survey, focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. Other methods used include document analysis and participant observation. This section discusses the data collection procedures, the rationale behind each method, research access and administration and fieldwork practices pertaining to all five methods.

4.5.1. DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY: RATIONALE FOR CHOICE AND USAGE
There are, broadly speaking, two types of surveys: the analytic and the descriptive (Oppenheim, 1992:21). The analytic design explores the associations between particular variables while the descriptive generalises findings in terms of frequency or prevalence of particular attributes. The intention of this study is to describe the nature of existing conditions in the three schools and the descriptive survey is suitable where there is a need “to scan a wide field of issues … in order to measure or describe any generalised features” (Morrison cited in Cohen et al., 2000:171).

Although the survey as a method is associated with positivist inquiry and somewhat incongruent with the interpretive paradigm, it is important to note that the value in a research method lies in the way in which it is used. Descriptive surveys are fact finding, and can be compared and used to produce trends (Cohen et al., 2000:171). The descriptive survey is therefore versatile even in post-positivist inquiry because it responds to the question ‘how many?’ showing what proportion of a population has a certain opinion or characteristic, or even how often events occur simultaneously (Oppenheim, 1992:31).
In this study, the descriptive survey scans a wide field of issues, which include demographic characteristics of students, teachers and parents, all of which augment the interpretive research design through ‘describing’ the ‘what is?’ with respect to the condition of girls’ education. On the whole the descriptive survey provides a backdrop that depicts the phenomena under study vis-à-vis broader economic, social and cultural realities. The descriptive statistics have also helped to construct three descriptive case studies, whose findings are comparable (see Chapter 8).

This notwithstanding, the descriptive survey is not the key data collection method even though it generates a vast amount of data. Rather, it is used to enhance the study because statistics are powerful indicators of trends. Given that this study links women’s education to economic development, the descriptive statistics point to where girls’ education is within the context of women’s development.

Descriptive statistics are also important considerations for intervention. Feminists like Jayaratne (1983), Reinharz (1992) and Jayaratne and Stewart (1995) have argued that quantitative methods are extremely useful in bringing about political change because of their ability to demonstrate generalisability of findings. They provide the kind of evidence that will convince those in public policy making capacities.

Given the fact that this study has a feminist inclination, I am sensitive to need for gender and feminist researchers to use statistics. However, my sensitivity lies in ‘unpacking statistics’. By juxtaposing them against critical interpretations, I provide deeper insights into the situation of girls’ education in Murang’a district and education choice-making processes.

### 4.5.1.1 Student questionnaire design, piloting and amendments

A good written questionnaire must be accessible in terms of content and sufficiently motivating for respondents to want to answer the questions and complete them. In other words, its general purpose must be clarified and translated into specific, concrete aims (Cohen et al., 2000:246).

For students, language must be accessible and clear in meaning (Oppenheim, 1992:102). Since the effective administration of self-completed questionnaires lies in questionnaire design, question type and wording for the teenage respondents (students) in this study, the
build up of question models and the balancing of question types was taken seriously. Oppenheim (1992:121) says that with each question a respondent should feel encouraged to cooperate. The importance of sequencing was not underestimated. An attempt was made to follow the three stages stipulated in Cohen et al., (2000:257), namely to commence with non-threatening factual questions, then to semi-structured questions and finally to unstructured questions. In order to make the questionnaire even more accessible and friendly, I divided it into three sections each with a heading so that the theme and purpose were clear. The first section was titled ‘family’. The second ‘school’ asked questions on student experiences of school activities and their relationship with key actors in school. The last section titled ‘subjects’ sought opinions on school subjects, careers, role models and university education.

Oppenheim (1992:109) has argued that seeking personal information at the beginning of a questionnaire is threatening. In a school context, bio data like age, gender, and marital status are mandatory for school records. This information was gathered early in the questionnaires based on the assumption that it is easily given in educational institutions.

With regard to individual question items and relatedness, Oppenheim (1992:122) states that a hidden attribute of every question is its link to the conceptual framework. His proposition is that, “there should always be a clear answer to queries such as ‘Why are we asking this question?’ ‘What is it doing here?’ ‘How do we intend to use the responses?’” The student questionnaire examined three aspects of the four research questions, namely subject, higher education preference and career aspirations. Although the respondents were a captive audience a variety of approaches were used to appeal to students.

More structured questions were asked than semi-structured or unstructured questions because structured questions yield data that is easy to manage, but more important, the study aimed at generating data that would be subjected to statistical analysis for trends and patterns to be established and to prepare a focus group interview guide.

The semi-structured format questions had a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ format, which required respondents to substantiate. Sentence completion items, according to Oppenheim (1992:56-57), encourage respondents not to digress. The tendency to falsify information is checked because the explanation “compels the respondent to come off the fence on an issue” (Cohen et al., 2000:250). Although ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses can be quantified, the explanations demanded in
these questions required opinions. These are subjective responses and in line with the interpretive orientation of this study. The attitudinal scale questions were similar. The student questionnaire had two such questions. The intention was to draw up sectors or groupings with respect to their attitudes toward various school activities in which they engaged and their attitudes towards their teachers. The second intention was to find out how students rate teachers and school activities. The ratings would facilitate the construction of girls’ schooling experiences and be valuable questions for cross-case comparison.

Oppenheim (1992:48) is categorical on the importance of piloting: “in principal, almost anything about a social survey can and should be piloted, from the detailed method of drawing the sample to the type of paper on which the interviewers will have to write”. The student questionnaire it was piloted twice, the teachers’ and school principals’ questionnaires once, followed by amendments. The parent questionnaire was not pilot tested.

The initial pilot test was exploratory and primarily concerned with the conceptualisation of the research problem (Oppenheim, 1992:48). It was undertaken with four first year university students in South African universities, all of whom had taken their secondary education in Kenya. Testing the questionnaire with mature girls in a completely different environment was done to check whether the questions addressed the issues that they, as secondary school girls, might have wanted to speak about in secondary school. Besides taking advantage of their availability, I also wanted to check that the wording and sequencing was good. Amendments were made following their suggestions.

The second pilot test was undertaken with a randomly selected sample of FIII and FIV students in a secondary school in Kenya. It addressed the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout, and was aimed at increasing validity and practicability of the questionnaire. Questionnaire completion was anonymous as I wanted to give students the freedom to express their views openly and in so doing provide them the space to give information which would enhance the design of the questions. Amendments were made from these returns. Redundant questions in the ‘school’ section were removed and some semi-structured questions reworded. Questionnaire completion time was given as twenty minutes, which for a captive audience was considered adequate. The second pilot was a lengthy process because it was conducted via postal services. The final draft of the student questionnaire contained twenty-four questions: sixteen structured questions, some with
multiple-choice options; five semi-structured and three unstructured or open-ended questions (see details in Appendix A).

Each questionnaire was colour-coded to ease administration processes: white for students, yellow for teachers, blue for school principals and pink for parents.

4.5.1.2 Parent questionnaire design
The parents’ questionnaire more or less focused on similar issues to those in the student questionnaire. Parents were included so as to obtain a parental perspective on girls’ education. But the completion of this questionnaire was entirely in the hands of their daughters.

So as to enable girls to provide adequate information about the nature of the study if their parents asked, the questionnaire was divided into three parts: A disaggregated section entitled ‘Mother’s Section’ and ‘Father’s Section’ had identically structured questions which sought to profile each parent separately by gender. In the third section, titled ‘To Be Filled In By The Parent/s’, a mixture of structured and unstructured questions were used to find out the number of children whom parents had in secondary school and also the cost of financing the education for their daughters enrolled in any of the three schools under study. Included in this section were two questions, with several subsections, which explored parents’ perceptions and opinions of their daughters’ academic performance, their skills and talents and their own reasons for having chosen their daughters’ school. Three other questions, also with subsections, explored parental involvement in their daughters’ education, specifically in relation to subject choices, higher education and career aspirations (see details in Appendix C).

4.5.1.3 Teacher questionnaire design
This questionnaire sought to know the teaching experiences of teachers, their opinions and perceptions about girls’ education. Some of the questions asked directly about girls’ academic performance. None were directed to girls’ educational choices and preferences. Rather, the mostly semi-structured questions elicited responses on teachers’ involvement in the girls education and the teachers’ perceptions of the girls. In particular, the questions focused on perceived academic abilities within the context of the various subjects in each school (see details in Appendix B).
4.5.1.4 School principal questionnaire design
This questionnaire, which was for the three school principals, sought personal and professional information. Structured questions elicited bio data, while the semi-structured and unstructured ones explored the principals’ experiences of leadership in girls’ schools, their perceptions and opinions on girls’ education and their contribution to girls’ education (see details in Appendix D).

4.5.1.5 Descriptive survey: Sampling procedures
As the four questionnaires discussed above show, four categories of people were targeted in this study. Each provides a different perspective on girls schooling. Teachers, parents and school principals may not enforce girls’ educational choices, but they are directly involved in the processes which drive the girls’ decisions, so they are in that sense partners in the choice-making process.

Teachers, parents and school principals are stakeholders in girls’ education. They are fundamentally important to the issues which are at the centre of this research and so their opinions were sought in order to:

- obtain a description of in school and out-of-school environment in terms of home background, parents’ education, family size, and teacher qualifications to facilitate a contextualisation of single-sex girls’ education;
- obtain a description of student and teacher attitudes towards their own schools;
- obtain a description of subjects and higher education preferences, career aspirations among the girls in FIII and FIV; and
- obtain students’, teachers and parents views on school subjects and career futures.

With questionnaires issues to four categories of people in three schools, a vast amount of data were going to be generated and a legitimate sampling criterion had to be employed.

Literature on survey sampling states that the smaller the population (N) the larger the sample (S) should be (Cohen et al., 2000). The student and teacher populations in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican vary in size and the classes have student of mixed academic ability. I took cognisance of this from the outset of my research.
Non-probability sampling was the sampling procedure used in this study. It was motivated by the argument that the logic and purpose of non-probability sampling lies in selecting data rich samples (Patton, 1990:169).

Although Oppenheim (1992:41) has pointed out that the quota sample does not meet the exacting standards of a probability sample, it is the non-probability equivalent of a stratified sample. It is claimed to complement interpretive research (Berg, 1998:228; Cohen et al., 2000:171). It facilitates the creation of a “sampling frame” (Oppenheim, 1992:39), which in this study includes socio-demographic features like age, gender, and home location. This type of sample also had the added advantage of loose representivity (Cohen et al., 2000:103), which proved to be a useful feature in this study where some of the findings emerged as typical across the cases and, therefore, have significance to the wider population of similar schools.

Academic achievement is important in the Kenyan education system and a lot of meaning is made of performance in both national and school examinations. End of term examination results for 2001 were used to provide high, average and low achieving students. Quite obviously the three categories were different for each school. Table 4.1 below shows the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Size of total population (N)</th>
<th>Size of sample population (S)</th>
<th>% of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yellowwood</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>50.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>49.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Hall</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>53.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>68.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>52.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>54.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same sampling strategy for students was applied to parents. The parent sample comprised only those parents whose daughters were in the student sample. For the teacher sample, it was my aim to include 50%, but this changed during the actual administration process. In all three schools, more teachers were included than were initially planned. No sampling was done for the three school principals, as all three were required to respond to a written questionnaire.
4.5.1.6 Questionnaire administration and fieldwork realities
Few researchers have ventured into rural schools in Kenya, thus the questionnaire was hardly an intrusion on the life of the respondents, as Cohen et al., (2000) have purported questionnaires may be, rather it was well received.

The administration of the written questionnaires was conducted successfully. I merely provided instructions on what needed to be done. I requested the assistance of the schoolteachers whom, I observed, were keen and supportive of the study, and I paid for their services as administrative work.

The teachers personally distributed the questionnaire and assisted the girls where there was need. Studies in schools easily provide a captive audience. This factor favoured the high return rate on student questionnaires (see details in Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). Perhaps also because of the nature of the audience, none of the students objected to completing the questionnaire even though it was made clear to them that they had the option to decline.

The same teachers distributed and collected the parents’ questionnaires via the students. The girls were instructed to take the questionnaires home to their parents during the half-term break and to return them duly completed. Here, the usual problems with self-completed questionnaires were encountered. For some of the parents, the purpose of the survey was unclear. This I attributed to a lack of understanding among some of the girls who could not differentiate between my being an independent academic researcher and one who wanted to assist the school by way of research. Some girls were confused and thought I was conducting research for their school on behalf of the Ministry of Education. Because of this confusion, issues arose with some parents who challenged the question on school fees for their daughters’ education. Because of the confusion, I concluded that it was possible that some parents thought that the question aimed to garner information so as to make adjustments to school fees!

In terms of completion and returns, questionnaire response was poor. Yellowwood had 90.2% in FIII and 97.8% in FIV. Fort Hall had 79.7% in FIII and 68% in FIV. Dominican had 45% in FIII and 80% in FIV, which was the lowest return rate of the three schools (see details and compare from Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4).
Although the literature reports that this was a reasonable return rate for such a sample (Cohen et al., 2000), the quality of question completion was poor and this was of great concern especially among the semi-structured and unstructured questions. Many Dominican parents failed to answer questions properly; they questions unanswered, or poorly expounded where an explanation was required. In terms of content validity this was a problem because it rendered some of the data unreliable. For such reasons, this particular questionnaire proved problematic at the data analysis stage.

For the teacher questionnaire, I played a more direct role in the administration. Using quota sampling, I selected teachers by gender, department, responsibilities and teaching experience. I was able to target all of these people and reach more of them because of their enthusiasm and eagerness to respond to the questionnaire, which I freely distributed. In Yellowwood, out of a teaching staff of 35 there were 33 teachers who completed the questionnaire; in Fort Hall, 26 out of 28, and in Dominican, 14 out of the 19.

I personally undertook the administration of questionnaire to the school principals. Initially, only two of the three completed the questionnaire and returned to me. The principal of Fort Hall did not, but I managed to obtain the same information during the one-on-one interview with her. Again, this is another challenge of leaving questionnaires with respondents.

4.5.1.6.1 Written questionnaire returns in Yellowwood

Table 4.2 below reflects the questionnaire distribution for Yellowwood. The sample was non-probable and the generalisations made in this study are relevant only to the sample even though they may echo many truths about the larger population, possibly even other schools in Murang’a district. The return rates for parents in this school were relatively high when compared with the other two schools.
### Table 4.2: Questionnaire Distribution in Yellowwood Girls School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Total Population (N)</th>
<th>Questionnaires distributed (S)</th>
<th>Questionnaires returned</th>
<th>Sample as % of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92 (100%)</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92 (100%)</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>82 (90.2%)</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>90 (97.8%)</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33 (94.2%)</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.5.1.6.2 Written Questionnaire Returns in Fort Hall

Table 4.3 below shows the questionnaire distribution and return patterns for Fort Hall. The return rate for parents was low because some girls forgot the questionnaires at home. The completion of individual questions also varies with the parent questionnaire.

### Table 4.3: Questionnaire Distribution in Fort Hall Girls School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Total Population (N)</th>
<th>Questionnaires distributed (S)</th>
<th>Questionnaires returned</th>
<th>Sample as % of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>63 (100%)</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51 (100%)</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>55 (87.3%)</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>47 (92.1%)</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26 (92.8%)</td>
<td>92.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.5.1.6.3 Written Questionnaire Returns in Dominican

Table 4.4 shows the consequences of poor questionnaire administration, in particular among FIII students whose low return rates suggest that they failed to indicate to their parents the importance of the questionnaire and completion deadline.

### Table 4.4: Questionnaire Distribution in Dominican Girls School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Size of Population (N)</th>
<th>Total Questionnaire distributed (S)</th>
<th>Questionnaires returned</th>
<th>Sample (S) as % of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40 (98%)</td>
<td>52.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38 (95%)</td>
<td>54.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18 (45%)</td>
<td>32.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32 (80%)</td>
<td>40.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14 (73.6%)</td>
<td>73.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW: RATIONALE AND USAGE

A focus group interview is defined as “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non threatening environment” (Krueger and Casey, 2000:5). The purpose of a focus group interview is to share perceptions and points of view. A focus group interview has been described as “most appropriate when the researcher has specific topics to explore and is not interested in the private aspects of people’s lives” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998:115). In a focus group interview, attention is on the respondent and emphasis is on the reality of the interviewee. The agenda of the participants predominates; hence discussions are conducted with similar types of participants. Focus group interviews are penetrative (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). According to Basch et al., cited in Berg, (1998:100) they pry into the “conscious, semiconscious, and unconscious psychological and social characteristics and processes among various groups”. They are in-depth, which allows a researcher to emerge with trends and patterns.

In so far as data collection and analysis processes are concerned, the degree of flexibility in qualitative research design bears a different significance from quantitative research (Burgess, 1985:7-10). Qualitative research seeks to establish how participants really think and feel (Krueger and Casey, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000:288). A focus group interview is a dialogic exchange that permits self-disclosure. It is a feature that blends well with the research design used in this study.

In terms of research methods, the focus group interview is an independent data collection technique like interviews or even participant observation (Morgan, 1988:10). The focus group interview is also perceived as a supplement to more traditional quantitative research design, in particular surveys (Cohen et al., 2000:288; Krueger and Casey, 2000). Though the focus group has yet to become popular within educational research, it has been found useful as a triangulation to more traditional methods (Cohen et al., 2000). In this study, these are written questionnaires. A key strength of the focus group interview in this study is that it is combines well with one-on-one interviews. This “broad involvement design”, as Krueger and Casey (2000:33) refer to it, provides the study with different perspectives on the same issues. Unlike the one-on-one interview, a focus group interview tends to be guided by the principle of “theoretical saturation” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The participants bring together varied opinions and perspectives through dialogic exchange. This feature makes the method
appealing to girls because it affords them an opportunity to assist one another in constructing ‘stories’ about their school lives until they have exhausted everything there is to say. The liveliness, complexity and unpredictability of the talk are strengths of focus group discussions (Myers and Macnaghten, 1999:175). Needless to say, individuals interpret similar schooling and educational experiences differently. For this reason, it was of paramount importance that focus on the research question was maintained.

Another strength of the focus group interviews is the ability to interrogate sensitive issues. Decisions related to school subject choice, career and higher education are personal and individual choices. In competitive educational arenas such as the Kenyan one, the opportunity to speak freely about one’s perceptions and opinions on these matters is rare, given that the pressure to excel does not encourage honest examination about girls’ real choices. Here, focus groups provide the opportunity for girls to speak about their own realities by becoming consciously reflective and even critical of their own lives. Berg (1998:100) and Vaughn, Jeanne and Sinagub (1996) agree that the informal group provides an atmosphere which encourages participants to “speak freely and completely about behaviours, attitudes, and opinions they possess.” For these reasons, a focus group might well be a place for girls to discuss and consider common and individual experiences and perceptions.

Myers and Macnaghten (1999:174) posit: “focus groups are typically designed to elicit something less fixed … something that the researcher may call feelings, or responses, or experiences, or world views”. How true! My own teaching experience has shown that students are ‘talked to’. Rarely are they encouraged to ‘talk about’ about their perceptions of schooling and education and, especially, school subjects, higher education and careers. Yet there is female under-representation at university, in science and technology courses and careers. The focus group is a research method that seeks to hear the voices of those at the grassroots, in order to understand and make sense of why these issues remain a persistent problem in schools and the education system. It is worth noting that rural secondary schools are at the grassroots, so this study heed to the suggestion that educational research in African contexts seek to “understand the insider’s view as opposed to the outsider’s view of the process and situation at its roots” (Wamahiu and Mwiria, 1995:115).

While attention is placed on understanding feelings, comments and thought processes of participants and the dialogic nature of focus groups generates verbal exchange, there is other
unspoken communication that is observed through group dynamics. Research on human subjects requires some degree of observation because there is unspoken communication in body language, facial expressions and gesturing. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:121) recommend that the researcher use an observational protocol for observational data. This would include descriptive notes, i.e. recording portraits of people, descriptions of physical settings, events or activities and even the reconstruction of dialogue; reflective notes, i.e. the researcher’s personal thoughts, including impressions and prejudices; and, finally, demographic information about the field in which observations were made. The degree to which observation is used as a method depends largely on the nature of the research design. Creswell (2003) states that the qualitative researcher when making observations may engage in roles that vary from non-participant to complete participant. I recorded my impressions of people and activities in the three schools.

Observations were made throughout the data collection process: however, field notes were made only where I felt that my records were going to help in authenticating what was actually said and meant. In such instances the need to keep a written record is a way of validating other data. It is mainly in the focus groups and during one-to-one interviews that I recorded my observations. I was always keen to observe and note demographic information when I was around the schools, specifically in the staff room and reception areas.

The perfect focus group interview is not easy to arrange. The literature recommends four to twelve participants for interactive data-yielding discussion. Typically the group comprises five to ten people but the size can range from as few as four to as many as twelve (Krueger and Casey, 2000:10; Morgan, 1988). More than twelve participants are said to fragment the group (Krueger and Casey, 2000:10). In Morgan’s (1988:43) observations, larger numbers might encourage “social loafing”.

Much as I kept to the numbers recommended in the literature, pragmatics sometimes ruled (Morgan, 1988:42-43; Berg, 1998:100). Because of the large number of focus group interviews scheduled, I doubled as researcher and moderator, a job that was both intense and ethically complicated. Towards the end of the interview process some of the groups also had to be combined for practical reasons. There is the possibility that this administrative change might have affected the dialogic processes in the interviews but not to any significant extent.
4.5.2.1 Design of focus group interviews for students

As already mentioned earlier in this chapter (see 4.5.1), the written questionnaires are ‘what is’ of this study. According to Krueger and Casey (2000:83) the purpose of focus group interviews is “not to infer but to understand, not to generalise but to determine the range and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people in the groups perceive a situation”. The focus group interviews explored the ‘why is’ question.

The interviews comprised a written protocol of pre-determined semi-structured and unstructured questions that provided the “questioning route” (Krueger and Casey, 2000:24). Arranged into six themes, these questions moved from the general to the specific: from school-based experiences, to personal experiences to home background. The themes were as follows (see details in Appendix E):

- Rural factor
- The choice of and attitude to school including:
  - Reflections on educational experiences and challenges in FI and II
  - Subjects preference
- Career aspirations
- Higher education aspirations

In terms of the actual administration I settled on eighteen focus groups: six in each school, and each had high, average and low achieving girls. The administration was conducted separately for each school and form.

In my role as a focus group moderator, I followed the suggestion made by Morgan (1988:49) that researchers should take a pragmatic position and decide their level of involvement based on what they want their interview materials to produce. Because I was interested in how students viewed their school, how they perceived their education vis-à-vis academic achievement, school subjects, careers and higher education, I focused on experiences, perceptions and processes. As a teacher researcher, I relied quite extensively on my own intuitions that are the culmination of long experience with girls’ schooling.

As a moderator, my involvement in discussions with the groups was minimal. I observed and probed to assist participants to speak especially where they were unclear or reluctant to speak.
out on issues, which I felt were valuable to the discussion. In a few cases, I had to steer the discussion back to focus when students appeared to digress.

Arguments have been made that tape recordings give a decontextualised version of proceedings (Kvale, 1996:160; Morgan, 1988:38). However, tape recording is the only format which preserves verbal proceedings in nearly authentic format. That preservation was of critical importance in this study, because of the number of interviews conducted.

4.5.2.2 Design of focus group interview for teachers
Teacher focus groups were few in number. In Yellowwood and Fort Hall, four groups each with four participants, in Dominican three groups each with four participants were scheduled.

A similar procedure to the one used with students was followed. The following were the themes scheduled for discussion (see Appendix F):

- Teaching as a career choice
- The experience of teaching girls
- School subjects
- Careers, jobs and futures for girls
- Parents of the school

My role as a moderator was, in many ways, similar to that described under student focus groups (see section 4.5.2.1).

4.5.2.3 Administration and fieldwork realities with focus group interviews
The realities of field practice often challenge the well-planned schedule of a qualitative researcher, particularly because qualitative research is labour-intensive and time-consuming. The field has its own realities and even the most willing of research participants must have time to give to the researcher. This was my experience with the focus group interviews scheduled in the schools.

According to Morgan (1988) there are research goals and practicalities that determine the number and size of groups. This came to mean reality rather late. However, when it did, I realised that the six focus group interviews scheduled in Dominican were not going to be necessary because the sample was small. Since the purpose of the focus group as a research method was to engage a small section of girls in in-depth discussions in order to hear what
they thought about the important issues they raised in the survey, I re-arranged the six and created two, one in FIII and one in FIV, each with twelve participants. The schedule in this particular school had to be postponed twice because the students were away from school for school fees related issues or sports so this decision was enforced by the unavailability of girls.

On the day of the interview, all twelve FIV participants turned up for the interview and eleven for the FIII interview (see details in Appendix K).

In addition to this administrative problem, interviews with Dominican girls were challenging. Besides their inability to grasp the questions I asked (many times I had to rephrase them, an occurrence I attributed to my framing of the questions and not the substance of them), the girls also found it difficult to communicate freely in their attempts to speak ‘perfect English’. This resulted in creating some degree of tension that prevented spontaneity. I drew their attention to this and told them I did not wish to pressurise them and that they could go ahead and speak in Kikuyu, Kiswahili or even ‘sheng’⁸. Whilst this did help to ease the tension, they persisted in using English.

The experience at Fort Hall was different. The initial plan to have six focus groups, three each from FIII and FIV, was thwarted when I discovered that recordings were damaged. The tapes were inaudible in most sections of three group recordings. The interviews were re-scheduled. However, because of time constraints on the part of the students, the three separate groups were combined into one interview each with FIII and FIV (see section 5.5.2.1.1). Twelve girls from each of FIII and FIV were selected for interviews; nine participated in FIII and six in FIV (see details in Appendix J).

The schedule at Yellowwood went ahead as planned. Focus groups interviews were convened with six groups, three groups in FIII and three in FIV (see details in Appendix I).

Fieldwork realities were particularly harsh with teacher focus groups. The initial plan was to include the deputy school principals with the teachers but when it became apparent that their work was not going to allow them to, I decided to re-schedule them for one-on-one interviews (see details in Appendix G).

⁸ Sheng is the local lingua franca used in Kenya by the youth. It is mixture of local dialects, Kiswahili and English, and is a common language of communication in school
In total thirteen ‘focus group interviews’ were conducted with teachers. In all three schools, teachers were difficult to deal with when it came to focus group interviews. For this reason, seven of the intended focus group interviews ended with less than the required four participants because teachers failed to turn up or were simply unable to fit into the time slotted for the focus groups. These developments resulted in a change to the design of the research. Nevertheless, the discussions were valuable and data-yielding.

4.5.3 ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW: RATIONALE FOR CHOICE
An interview is a verbal account from which much is learnt about the life of a phenomenon. According to Kvale (1996:126-27) interviews need to be similar except perhaps in their structure. The degree of looseness also varies depending on whether the interview is exploratory or hypothesis testing, whether it seeks description or interpretation, whether it is cognitive or emotion focused. The closed or open structure of interview questions determines the extent to which the interview explores for information or confirms assumptions.

In this study, the one-on-one interview, also known as the “in-depth interview” (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993) or “depth interview” (Oppenheim, 1992:68-69) was used. This interview is modelled after a conversation between equals, rather than as a formal question and answer exchange (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998:88). Kvale (1996:14) observes that the interview as a technique involves the interchange of views and opinions between people on issues of shared interest. It begins with semi-structured questions, which eventually lead to unstructured questions or open-ended probes (Berg, 1998:61) and moves from the known to unknown and is for this reason normally used with key informants (Oppenheim, 1992). The open-ended questions in one-on-one interviews have the added advantage of improved response rates (Oppenheim, 1992:81). Such interaction is central to knowledge production, which is the reason why this format was used with school principals in my study.

The interview with school principals has other significance. Academic excellence, or at the very least, the pursuit or enforcement of it by an individual and/or the school constitutes the everyday lived world of the school principal and student. It is a world where the school principal, in her official and private capacity as administrator and leader/mother and female respectively, impacts on girls’ education and their experiences at school. The one-on-one interview facilitates a launch into this world.
Seidman (1991) has argued that the purpose of interviewing people is to understand their experiences and the meanings they derive from them. Silverman (1993) states that an open-ended interview enables interviewees to express themselves and their views of the world in their own way. Like Silverman, Kvale (1996:27) adds that the purpose of the qualitative research interview is to “understand themes of the lived world from the subjects’ own perspectives.” He urges that that interviewing be carried on until that which is unknown becomes known (Kvale, 1996:101). This was my intention when exploring the lived world of school principals as it pertains to girls’ education.

4.5.3.1 One-on-one interview design and administration

The one-on-one interview protocol, like the focus group interview, was based on predetermined questions based on the findings that emerged in the written questionnaires administered to the school principals (see details in Appendix H).

According to Oppenheim (1992:65), the interview, unlike most other research techniques, requires interpersonal skills of a high order, more especially the depth interview where the idea is to collect ideas and not just data. As such, it is desirable that someone in the know conducts the interview. An effective interviewer, according to Kvale (1996:148-49), possesses the following abilities: knowledge of the subject matter, a clear structure and purpose for the interview, a clear presentation of the subject matter, gentleness in handling the interviewee and the interview process, sensitivity and empathy, an appreciation and openness of the things which the interviewee considers to be important, a critical ear, a keen sense of interpretation and alertness to clarification and confirmation and finally, a good memory.

As an experienced teacher, interviewing was not an entirely new experience for me even though the scholarly purposes for which this particular set of interviews were conducted was different. In the administration of the three one-on-one interviews, I followed Kvale’s suggestions. However, establishment of rapport did not come easily, and the selection of a setting has a lot to do with it because of power asymmetries and personal space (Kvale, 1996:126).

Taylor and Bogdan (1998:27) have stated that it is difficult to obtain the right kind of setting for this kind of interview. It requires diligence and patience in the negotiation of access.
There were potential power asymmetries given my junior status as a classroom teacher, which could have caused tension, but I presented myself as amenable. Perhaps for this reason, I was found agreeable by all three principals but felt particularly at ease with the principal of Fort Hall because my research interest coincided with her own schooling experiences. She realised from the outset that my research would directly benefit her school. Thus I was admitted to their public space (offices and the schools they head) and of particular importance the private space (their lives as mothers, teachers, leaders and women) and they permitted me to engage on social, intellectual and emotional levels. Naturally, the depth of engagement varied.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES
Creswell (2003) has argued that the integration of two types of data can occur at several stages in the research process i.e. during data collection, analysis, or interpretation, or a combination of all three stages. Cohen et al., (2000) consider that data analysis should be made at an early stage, the reason being that the mixing of data at the collection stage enables a researcher to gather a richer and more comprehensive data set. I support these authors for the simple reason that in a study with two types of data, each set serves a particular function in the study. In my study, qualitative data were privileged over quantitative data, because qualitative data illuminates the complexity of girls’ educational experiences more fully. This data brings out the simultaneous influence of gender, school type, and home background and their effects on educational experiences and subsequent educational choices.

This section presents the procedures followed in analysing quantitative and qualitative data derived from written questionnaires, focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews, documents and observations. The analysis data of each set of data is discussed separately but in the case study chapter the data is combined in accordance with Creswell (2003) and Brannen (2004) who argue the benefits of combining quantitative and qualitative data are that it corroborates, cross-validates or complements results of either data source.

In my study, which examines schooling experiences and educational choices, the two sets of data converge on the girls, the phenomena under study, illuminating the factors, features and processes which created schooling experiences and the resultant choices.
4.6.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS
Basic statistical analysis was done with the quantitative data (Radloff and Irwin, 2001). These data provided profiles giving detailed descriptions of the situations and realities in each school. Primary features include the school category, and the choices and preferences with regard to school subjects, higher education and careers. Secondary features are related to socio-economic factors such as education and home background.

4.6.1.1 Written questionnaire: Data capture and analysis
The initial plan for analysis did not include the use of computer software; however, the decision to use this was taken when I realised that the written questionnaires had generated vast amounts of data, which were going to be difficult to process manually. Statistica, the computer software that I chose to use, organised and processed the data far more quickly and efficiently than would have been the case had I done it manually.

The interest of the study was to reveal a combination of ‘in’ and ‘out’ of school features such as family size, education levels in families, perceptions on school and subject choice patterns. As such most of the data were captured in categorical and numerical variables (Radloff and Irwin 2001; Cohen et al., 2000:218), providing a range of descriptive measurements such as patterns, frequencies, means, percentages and modals. With a non-probability sample, non-parametric tests were used because no assumptions were being made about the wider population.

The questionnaires yielded vast amounts of data, however, because of the interpretive nature of the study, analysis required well-thought-out criteria that would focus on those aspects that enrich data derived from the focus group and one-on one interviews, either by complementing it or by opening up avenues for interrogation and further questioning. Here, the same procedure was used to analyse the student, parent and teacher questionnaires. Of the 24 questions in the student questionnaire, 44 variables were created and captured on Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, transferred into Statistica software and processed using descriptive statistical techniques. The parent and teacher questionnaires had 19 and 15 variables respectively and some of these variables were correlated yielding the attributes that describe students and their schooling. This analysis was particularly useful across the cases (see Chapter 8).
4.6.2 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS
Organising, accounting and explaining qualitative data commences with data collection primarily because qualitative research methods also generate huge amounts of data (Cohen, et al., 2000:77). Because interpretive research must yield insights and understanding of people’s behaviours, lives, stories, interactions and relationships (Cohen et al., 2000:22; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993:238), the qualitative researcher constantly forms new concepts or refines concepts which are grounded in data (Neuman, 2000:159). This iterative process is a sense-making process, whereby the vast amounts of text eventually lead to the generation of theory, the end product of a qualitative data analysis. Meaning making is also made through theoretical sensitivity. Theoretical sensitivity is a researcher’s the personal quality it breeds “an awareness of the subtleties of meanings of data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:41). In my case, the sensitivity comes from teaching experience and interest in girls’ education.

The analysis of the focus group and one-to-one interviews was guided by the following seven steps outlined by Cohen et al., (2000:148):

1. Establish units of analysis of the data, indicating how such units are similar and different from each other
2. Create a ‘domain analysis’
3. Establish relationships and linkages between the domains
4. Make speculative inferences
5. Summarise
6. Seek negative and discrepant cases
7. Theory generation

The study shows that girls are able to access schooling. Qualitative data is used to interrogate the how, what and why of secondary school access. The data provides a ‘face’ and a meaning to these numbers by exploring girls schooling experiences and explaining how and why certain choices are made over others.

4.6.2.1 Focus group interview data analysis
Focus group interview analysis is systematic, sequential, verifiable and continuous (Krueger and Casey, 2000:128). In this study, the collection and analysis was done concurrently. The process was systematic: it was done by school, group and question.
The bulk of a focus group analysis is transcript based (Krueger and Casey, 2000:130). The first step of the analysis involved transcribing the tape recordings in conjunction with relevant observation notes. Where necessary, I probed further into observations and responses. Notable reactions by individual participants were also probed, as were silences.

In my analysis, I was alert to the interpretive nature of the study and for this reason chose to rely on thematic analysis. I printed out the transcribed interviews for better management of the coding process.

Thematic analysis is a coding technique; it is a process that precedes meaning making (Tesch, 1990:142-145). It involves organising text into chunks and labelling the categories with terms based on the actual language of the participants. Coding makes it easy to delve deeper into data and make it more meaningful.

In line with this, “units of analysis” were established and guided by the coding structure suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992:166-172). With regard to codes on setting and context, I included those themes that pointed to the school, its type, category and history. For perspectives of people and objects, I focused on the data which brought out girls’ opinions on schooling, education and issues pertaining to educational choices. Regarding process and activity codes, I was keen to identify and link the processes and activities which shaped and influenced choice and preference of school subjects, higher education and careers. Regarding relationships and social and structure codes, I was equally keen to seek out the links which girls made to the social dynamics emanating from their homes and elsewhere.

I read over the transcripts several times, colour coding sections (I used coloured highlighter pens) according to the codes. It has already been stated that the processing and analysing of qualitative data is an iterative exercise that involves organising data, describing, categorising and making inferences. As the analysis advanced and categories began to emerge so did themes. Wherever possible, I used the participants’ own words as theme headings. I also identified and stored on the computer words, phrases and even whole sections for verbatim quotation in individual case study chapters. Domains were created within which data were reviewed, categorised and refined. Relationships and linkages between categories were established in individual cases and also across the three. Cross-case comparisons were done
to demonstrate overt differences between the schools, and to extend the summaries of key findings to a level where they could be discussed as trends and patterns in girls’ education.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, few qualitative studies have been undertaken on girls’ educational choices, so the methodology itself is significant in terms of the phenomenon under study and the context within which it is undertaken.

4.6.2.2 One-on-one interviews: Data capture and analysis
The same procedure as explained above was used for the analysis of one-on-one interviews.

For teachers who were interviewed alone, the data collected was compared with that of those interviewed in a group. This was done for internal data validation.

The school principal interviews were analysed individually.

4.7 THE ETHICS OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
This section discusses the ethics of educational research in two interlinked sections. The teacher researcher, schools as sites for research, research access, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity are discussed in the first section. The second section examines validity and reliability.

Education lies within the public domain, and the need to better understand education and schooling has increased research interest in education. Debates have led to questions, which in turn have led to schools becoming sites of educational research. Schools remain contested terrain, which is why there is there is a whole discourse on the ethics of research within educational settings alongside that on educational research (see Cohen et al., 2000; Bassey 1999; Keeves, 1988).

The ethics governing education research is mainly uniform; however, the nature of education settings is not. Educational settings are bound within a context, which is shaped by social, economic, political and cultural factors, and they have an ethical dimension that is worth considering.
Under the global EFA initiative, national governments are mandated to make schooling accessible to and equitable for all by 2015. With such on going development agendas in education, it means that research tends to focus on school enrolment. The latest EFA country report on Kenya strongly conveys this, in particular, the need to monitor trends and patterns in education. The report encourages gender-sensitive analysis of education trends, but monitoring tends to stop at numbers. These numbers still warrant a more critical lens because the challenges of educating girls in particular require a different kind of analysis. It is my contention that ‘qualitiveness’ provides a humanistic side to education as a phenomenon that is intersected by social, economic, cultural and political factors. It is here that ethical challenges arise.

Proponents of teacher-initiated research, Stenhouse (1975) have argued that both curriculum development and teachers' professional development improve when teachers systematically study the processes of teaching and learning and become critical of conventional models of pedagogy.

Through my engagement in this doctoral study, I have progressively become critical of the conventional ways of conducting research. Since this study explores schooling beyond the veneer of statistical balances, it challenges positivism, which is the dominant research paradigm used in educational research in Kenya. This study underscores the place of non-positivistic research in Kenyan education and lends credence to the case study as a research design of significance where depth is sought when using 'difficult to understand phenomena’ within educational settings. However, the research design selected is hardly representative of the reality of the three thousand plus secondary schools in Kenya.

4.7.1 ACCESS TO RESEARCH SETTING

Field research refers to “the real life situation … where whatever we are interested in occurs … be it in an office, school, hospital, home, street or football ground” (Robson, 1993:2). In research relating to real life, a researcher is in contact with people and their lived experiences. Since the case study is an investigation into holistic and real life events, then conducting field research complements meaning-making objectives of interpretive research. However, as with all naturalistic inquiry, it is important to note that research participants can be vulnerable to
unethical practice. As such, ethical considerations must be considered, more especially in educational research in schools where power is imbalanced.

Schools, are easily accessible to researchers especially when the researchers are themselves teachers (Bogdan and Taylor, 1998:28; Stenhouse, 1975) and gatekeepers (often school heads) become convinced of the value of the research (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998:33).

If access to a school is not the biggest hurdle in school research then what is? It is ensuring that research participants remain accessible throughout the research process and, more importantly, that they maintain their interest in the research. This responsibility is the researchers and it is couched in research ethics governing informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Kvale, 1996:112-117).

The initial stage of all research is proposal writing. Throughout this initial stage I followed the guidelines governing research ethics at Rhodes University. I adhered to the rules governing research with human subjects and I was especially careful to ensure that I obtained consent before I ran pilot tests (see 4.5.1.2).

While in Kenya to conduct fieldwork, the second stage of my research, I adhered to the regulations governing the issuance of research clearance by the Ministry of Education, Nairobi, Kenya. I was issued with a research clearance certificate without much hassle. With this certificate, I was free to access all schools in Murang’a District for a period of six months so long as they were willing to have me (see Appendix V).

Real life research within educational contexts can be equated with needs-based research (Bassey, 1999). Such research demands that the researcher not only produce findings but also make recommendations if solutions are not found. Such kinds of needs, however legitimate, can complicate research ethics, however, at the same time they force the education researcher to develop codes of practice. As far as my research was concerned, giving back to those I took from was going to be important. After drawing up my sample of schools I visited Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican and made my request and commitment in writing that I would compile a report of my research findings and submit a copy to each school involved in this study (see Appendix U). In return I received verbal commitment assuring me of the schools’ willingness to work with me and, the freedom to access the research site for as long
as I wanted, providing that I did not violate the participants’ privacy and confidentiality or become disruptive to school routine.

4.7.1.2 Informed consent

“Social scientists generally have a responsibility not only to their profession in its search for knowledge and quest for truth, but also for the subjects they depend on for their work” (Cohen et al., 2000:56), as such whether or not a research encounter disrupts the lives of the participants, there are consequences to it. For instance, badly treated research subjects will respond negatively to other researchers. For such reasons, maintaining ethical standards is a vital factor because it paves the way for other researchers. Adherence to ethical measures is vital because research participants must be protected and assured that the research process in which they engage is legitimate and honourable.

By and large I found gaining informed consent from the school principals, the teachers and the students unproblematic. Though this fact benefited me greatly, I remained vigilant and conscious that “the principle of informed consent arises from the subjects’ right to freedom and self determination” (Cohen et al., 2000:50). As such, even with the support of local the district education office and the ministry of education, I knew I had to ask for consent individually. I sought the consent of parents through the school principals, the fact that the parents agreed to respond to the written questionnaire without ever meeting me revealed to me the powerful role which educational institutions command where research is concerned.

Although I was quite surprised to be granted access to parents by proxy! I concluded that they placed a high premium on my work, or else they felt obliged to support research undertaken under the name of the school which their daughters attended. However, given that the study was ‘sold’ to them as one that would bring a better understanding of the problems facing girls during their education, I dare to say that it was unlikely for them to refuse to participate, as my research would ultimately be of benefit to them.

Although securing informed consent was unproblematic, to avoid unnecessary tensions and power struggles, I was especially careful about the different power asymmetries I anticipated during the data gathering process. Despite the fact that most of the teachers were my equals, the school principals were my seniors and the students my juniors, I had to take into account that I was working in a typical Kenyan secondary school where the organisational structure is
hierarchy. I had to negotiate access from the top, even though my interests lay primarily with those at the bottom. I had to make sure that each school principal found value in my research. Taylor and Bogdan (1998:33) state that in some cases it is important to stipulate that a setting is selected because of particular characteristics. This was the explanation I gave the school principals for my choice of their schools from amongst the eleven others in the district.

Having negotiated access with each school principal in her office, I explained the nature of the study, the duration and the demands it would make on participants (Cohen et al., 2000:51). I asked to be allowed to make similar negotiations and explanations to the staff, which I did in the staff room. I explained in detail that individuals willing to work with me to the end of the project would be required to sign an informed consent form because of the nature of data to be collected. I made it particularly clear that even though considerable care was going to be taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, information could be linked to the school and to the research participants if anyone searched hard enough. The same explanation was made to the students through the research assistants whom I worked with. During the actual interviews, I gave the participants my assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

All the groups accepted to work under the conditions as explained to them and duly agreed to sign the consent form before the interviews were commenced (see Appendix W). I concluded that research participants within school settings were considerably more flexible regarding anonymity and confidentiality because, perhaps, the outcomes of the research process were of greater importance to them than their signatures.

**4.7.1.2 Confidentiality and anonymity**

Informed consent provides the basis on which to structure an ethical basis for research (Cohen et al., 2000:52). As such, the promise of anonymity, confidentiality comes high on the ethical checklist, likewise the truth in representing research content (ibid.56). In my case, anonymity and confidentiality were assured at the beginning of the research. While the decision to use or not use pseudonyms would have made no particular difference to the way some of the participants expressed themselves in the focus group interviews, I felt that there was a need to protect them both in the thesis and in the reports submitted to the school because for the school reports, identities were easy to trace. I decided too that I would use pseudonyms to protect the schools in all future publications.
4.7.2 RESEARCH VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

It is standard procedure in social science and educational research to show evidence of research validity and reliability. For a study to be described as valid, it has to accurately reflect that it has measured what it set out to measure. In other words it has to be authentic in its conclusions and findings must be supported by data or sufficient evidence to make it believable (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Since validity is about research that is sound, cogent, well grounded, justifiable, or logically correct (Schwandt, 1997), then Cohen et al., (2000:105) are correct in the statement “validity is an important key to effective research”. Their caution that, “if a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless” highlights just how important it is to interlink research questions, theory, methodology, data, discussions and conclusions.


Reliability is associated with traditional forms of research, primarily those within the positivist paradigm and especially surveys with randomised samples and experiments in the physical sciences. Reliability in such research is usually tested by replication or repetition and is a precondition for validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:292). Such replication or repetition is ill fitting in the interpretive paradigm. Researchers like myself, who work under this paradigm, are often called to task over reliability. However, with the theoretical developments in qualitative research there is some consensus that reliability is inapplicable to qualitative research in the same way that it is to quantitative/empirical research. In naturalistic inquiry there is deliberate avoidance of control and manipulation of the phenomena under study (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993:332); there are alternatives that address the issue. Lincoln and Guba (1985:328) identify credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity as worthy of consideration when dealing with such data. Others like LeCompte and Preissle (1993:332), Bogdan and Biklen (1992:48) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000b) argue that where a high degree of accuracy is maintained and coverage is
comprehensive, reliability can be attained. I tend to agree with these authors because the more important question to ask when considering research validity and reliability is ‘what is the purpose of this research?’ and ‘how is it conducted?’

In this study, it is taken that validity is to qualitative data what reliability is to quantitative data. This position is based on the interpretive nature of the study and on the notion that “trustworthiness”, “authenticity” and “credibility” which are associated with naturalistic inquiry and qualitative data can be equated with reliability of quantitative data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:290-300).

**4.7.2.1 Validity within the interpretive paradigm**

With the differences between reliability and validity made clear, and the position of the researcher as an interpretive researcher specified, it is useful to relate validity to the interpretive case study.

The inability to make grand generalisations from the case study is a criticism levelled against the method (Stake, 2000:19). However, as has been pointed out already, this study does not make claims to grand generalisation, but rather to a broadened scope for analytic generalizations (Yin, 1993). Since the case studies are typically information rich (Patton, 1990) they allow for cross-case comparisons (see Chapter 8). They also have the advantage of transferability. This means that the reader is permitted to establish the extent to which findings fit into another situation. Transferability is criticised for being a clone of positivistic generalisability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:316), but, at the very least, it gives the user different perspectives from which to judge claims made. According to Stake (2000:19), naturalistic generalisation, which can be derived from case study research, is epistemologically in harmony with the research experience and, for the reader, the case study gives one a natural basis for making such generalisation. To a reasonable degree, in this particular study, the multiple case study design allowed for the possibility of transferability, which helped to reduce possible researcher bias, which in my case, would stem from my familiarity with girls education. For the foregoing reasons, I agree with Gronlund cited in Cohen *et al*., (2000:105) that validity in qualitative research is more a matter of degree than an absolute state.

Qualitative researchers vary in their stand on validity (see Cohen *et al*., 2000:105; Creswell, 2003:196; Maxwell, 1992). Some, like Krueger and Casey (2000:203) complain that,
“validity is overemphasised in qualitative research.” It is an argument that suggests that validity in qualitative research is somewhat a clone of validity in quantitative research. Their suggestion appears to be that researchers concentrate on good practice. In the context of this research good practice is secured through triangulation.

Research interpretations and constructions are built upon evidence. Evidence from multiple sources is reported to be stronger and more credible than that from a single method (Denzin, 1988). It is on the strength of this that there are different types of triangulation namely data triangulation, researcher triangulation and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1988). Triangulation is a credibility procedure that leads to valid interpretations and conclusions about the phenomenon under study.

Methodological and data triangulation are secured through multiple data gathering methods and multiple types of data. Cohen et al., (2000:113) have argued that the use of a variety of data gathering instruments builds into the study methodological triangulation, which in turn, reduces possible researcher bias. For this particular study, the six months of data collection enabled the examination and analysis of the phenomena under study through various techniques. With written questionnaires on four different groups of people, focus groups on two groups and one-on-one interviews on one group, there was rigour in the data gathering process and in the nature of data obtained. This data were also corroborated in terms of how it was generated. I found that methodological triangulation placed me in a position where I could make a critical analysis of data where I would not be surprised to see what it found. I also found that it kept in check researcher bias, which would have stemmed from my involvement and familiarity with girls’ education in Kenya.

Methodological and data triangulation also checks internal validity. Though the schools in this study are unique entities, the multiple methods broaden the scope of analytic generalizations of the three case studies (Yin, 199b). Teachers, parents and school principals constitute three different groups, which converge in diverse but important and significant ways on girls’ education. Here, these diverse groups and the schools, which are also considered as organisations with their own culture, combine resulting in various interconnected levels of triangulation.
Finally, I stated earlier that there seems to be bias towards positivist methods in most Kenyan studies on girls’ education (see section 2.4). The use of more than one method in this study enriches the depth to which one could explore and interpret girls’ educational choices. It also adds to the debate on combined methods and the combined use of quantitative and qualitative data to corroborate complex phenomena.

4.7.3 ETHICAL DILEMMAS ENCOUNTERED

It is a basic principle governing data collection that no harm should come to research subjects as a result of their participation in research (Oppenheim, 1992:83). For surveys and other methods linked to positivist research, the likelihood of research participants being harmed is low. However, with other methods, like the interviews used in this study, the “non traceability, anonymity and non identifiability” which Cohen et al., (2000:110) describe as the central ethical tenets of most research, can be assured but are not always guaranteed.

As already mentioned, the researcher is the main research instrument in interpretive research and because of purposive selected samples, small size populations and the depth of study the degree of traceability, anonymity and non identifiability is reduced from the outset of the study. As a whole, the subjective nature of the study negates total anonymity. For this reason, ethical concerns arise with the study as an entirety and at the level of each method.

The ethical concerns arising from the descriptive survey are different from those arising from the one-on-one interview. In the case of the latter, the interviewees are a small sample, which makes it difficult to conceal their identity. Yellowwood is the leading girls’ school in Murang’a district and it does not require much effort to trace the real identity of the school. Though pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the informants, this is not sufficient to prevent the identification of a key stakeholder like the school principal from being known.

The above point simply illustrates that while ethics is an important concern, non-traceability, anonymity and non-identifiability, will vary in degree depending on the research paradigm used, the questions being asked in the study and the size of the study. For research with feminist inclinations, the traceability of a participant is sometimes of less importance if and when an informant is raising issues that are important to the status and standing of women.
This was appears to be the case with the three school principals whose identities are not difficult to trace.

All in all, in terms of keeping to the ethics of research ethics, I did what I had to as best as I could.
CHAPTER 5
A CASE STUDY OF YELLOWWOOD GIRLS’ HIGH SCHOOL

So I think it is the child herself. The child I have over here has all the potential but it is like there is something tying that potential that is really not coming out, so I am still looking for that which is tying them.
(School Principal, Yellowwood Girls High School)

5.1 INTRODUCTION
Ollenburger and Moore (1992:104) have argued that education structures pattern women’s lives so that the type of education that women receive influences the work and the economic rewards available to them later in life. These patterns are visible in waged employment. In Kenya, low job status and unemployment is characteristic of women. Given that a job is an eventual outcome of education (Schiefelbein and Farrell, 1980), when the larger percentage of the national population (which is women) does not secure decent employment then there is need to examine girls schooling experiences, subject choice pattern, higher education and career aspirations for the kinds of educational opportunities available, equitability and quality of education vis-à-vis employability because low job status and unemployment reflect the kind of education that is available to women.

In the previous chapter, I raised the question “can educational and schooling experiences be accounted for in terms of the way they structure and shape girls’ education choices?” In this chapter, which is the first of the three case study chapters, I argue that an individual’s choice tends to be laden with values emanating from both inside and outside school because education is bound in a context. In my attempt to interpret how girls construct and give meaning to schooling experiences and educational choices, I account for how social, cultural and economic factors intersect schooling and education. In the analysis, which makes use of both quantitative and qualitative data, I demonstrate how the school, the family and home background interact on individual and collective schooling experiences and choices.

5.2 A PROFILE OF YELLOWWOOD GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL
5.2.1 THE INFRASTRUCTURE
Yellowwood is located in a rural part of the Murang’a District, 14 km north of Murang’a town. Like most secondary schools in colonial Africa, Yellowwood is a missionary establishment (Otiende, Wamahiu and Karugu 1992; Sifuna, 1990). The school was originally a teacher training college, established in the 1930s by the Church Missionary Society (CMS).
It became a girl’s boarding school in 1958 (Sifuna, 1990:49) and remained under the auspices of the Anglican Church even after independence. Church mission affiliated teachers continued to teach in the school until the late seventies when education reform, in particular the ‘Africanisation’ of Kenyan education, began to replace European teachers with African ones. Today Yellowwood is a top girl’s school in Central Province and the leading school in Murang’a District. Though it is a government school, it still has a strong affiliation with the Anglican Church, and from my observations there is a strong Christian ethos that is embedded in the daily school activities. The school is managed by a board of governors (BOG) and parents’/teachers’ association (PTA). The latter has a representative from the church. Women head both bodies and gender representation is fairly balanced.

At the onset of this study in February 2002, the school had 37 teaching staff, 8 administrative staff and 41 support staff including a laboratory technician, drivers, plumbers, cooks, artisans and watchmen. There were 748 students enrolled in the 16 classes: 194 in form one (FI), 187 in form two (FII), 181 in form three (FIII) and 186 in form four (FIV). Most of the classes had in excess of 45 students.

As is the case in most developing countries, the qualities of schooling facilities often determine the quality of learning and teaching (Mwiria, 1990). Physical facilities in Kenyan secondary schools vary. In terms of size, Yellowwood is a big school, spread on a hilly forty acres. Though it has relatively modern buildings, it has old structures that date back to 1925 when the CMS missionaries first settled there. All of the buildings with the exception of the Art and Music Rooms are well maintained and have been put into good use. Other facilities include three science laboratories, a home science room, a library with under 1,000 books and a computer laboratory with 12 computers and a printer. The science laboratories are particularly well equipped and the book collection in the library is growing. Sporting facilities include an athletics field, a tarred basketball court, a lawn tennis court and a netball and volleyball pitch.

Yellowwood is a boarding school so it has fourteen boarding houses, a dining hall and kitchen, a sanatorium and a school chapel. The latter has been expanded to accommodate the growing student numbers because it also serves as an assembly hall. At least 70% of the
teaching staff is housed on the school campus: this includes the school principal and her
deputy as well as support staff such as the school nurse and matron.

The school has its own water treatment works and an incoming-generating farm with dairy
cattle and subsistence food crops. Food grown on the farm is used in the school-dining hall.
The school owns three vehicles, one of which is a modern 62-seater bus.

On the whole Yellowwood is visibly a well-managed school and a centre of education
excellence. It houses resource centre for the Science and Mathematics Secondary School
Education Project (SMASSE) for Murang’a District. SMASSE is a national project sponsored
by the Japanese and Kenya governments that equips mathematics and science teachers with
resources and teaching methodology. The mathematics and science teachers at Yellowwood
have free access to the centre.

5.2.2 THE PEOPLE

Like the infrastructure, teaching staff in boarding schools is somewhat a permanent feature.
Long serving teachers bear the ethos of a school and perpetuate its traditions. By the end of
the four-year secondary school cycle, teachers are established in the culture and traditions of a
school. This is the case in yellowwood where a few members of staff are former students.
Teachers are included in the school profile in a personal and professional capacity and also
because of their stake in school culture.

Excluding the female school principal, thirty-three teachers completed the written
questionnaire distributed to thirty-six teachers; sixteen of the respondents were male and
seventeen female (see Table 4.2). In terms of age and marital status, 75.7% of the teachers
indicated that they were married while 24.2% indicated unmarried. Almost two thirds (63.6%)
were in the 26-30 age range while a third (33.3%) between 36-55. Compared to Dominican,
teachers in Yellowwood are more mature in terms of age (see section 7.2.2). Their age
corresponds with the cumulative years of teaching. In Yellowwood it is 33 years compared to
26 in Fort Hall and 14 in Dominican. More than half of the teaching staff (51.5%) have
between 6-14 years teaching experience, 21% above 15 years and 27.2% 0-5 years. The
majority (75.7%) of teachers in Yellowwood chose teaching for a career. An equally large
majority (90.9%) also indicated that they derived satisfaction from teaching in the school even
though 50% said that they would leave teaching if they got better career opportunities. These statistics explain why the retention rate among teachers in this school is exceptionally high.

For academic qualifications, 54.5% of teachers have bachelor’s degrees and 45.5% have diplomas. With regard to additional qualifications, very few teachers (18%) are taking further studies in Yellowwood and it is also a comparatively low figure when compared to Dominican (35.7%) and Fort Hall (23.0%) (see section 6.2.2 and section 7.2.2). Perhaps the difference can be explained by the fact that teachers in Yellowwood want to be teachers and derive satisfaction from teaching. With career satisfaction they are unlikely to pursue further studies, which for many teachers is used as a means of finding ways out of the teaching profession as is the case with teachers in Dominican (see section 7.2.2).

5.3 CONTEXTUALISING GIRLS’ EDUCATION

The profiles in this section provide a context to girls’ education. They frame the social and cultural context that girls come from and the background that constitutes the foundation of their educational experiences. The profiles are built from the perspective of students, parents, teachers and school principal and take into account the following aspects:

- Age and home and family background, in order to establish the kinds of families they are from and their previous education background. This information is important because it is linked to perceived academic abilities and career aspirations.
- Education in the family, in order to establish who receives what kind of education.
- Girls’ educational profile, in order to establish what level of education and career opportunities they aspire to and their perceptions about school.
- Subject preference patterns, in order to establish the school subjects they like, dislike and choose to take, and also the subjects they would like to have offered in their schools.
- The teachers’ profile has already been given in the preceding section.

5.3.1 PERSONAL BACKGROUND

5.3.1.1 Age, family size, schooling and home background

The girls in FIII and FIV fall in 14-20 age range. The median age is 17.0 years and the mean age 16.6 years. The majority (74.5%) are between 16 and 17 years, which is the normal age for FIII and FIV considering that schooling begins at six years in Kenya (RoK, 1998). Generally, the girls in this school are ‘younger’ when compared with their counterparts in Fort
Hall (see section 6.3.1) and Dominican (see section 7.3.1). However, there are girls that are too young or too old for the grades but they represent only 0.6%.

With regard to home background, nearly two-thirds of the girls are from a home background that is rural, where family size ranges from one to nine children. The data shows that 59.8% are from ‘rural’ homes with at least four children. 17.9% are from ‘small towns’ and 10.3% ‘big towns’, which in Kenya include the thriving industrial and farming towns and provincial headquarters like Nakuru, Thika and Nyeri. The ‘city’, which would be Nairobi, accounts for 12%.

Most of the girls in this school received primary education in government schools, namely government day schools (70.1%) and government boarding schools (10.3%). However, a significant percentage (19.6%) attended private schools. Of these schools, slightly more than half 59.8%, were located in rural areas, 23.9% in small towns, 8.7% in big towns and 7.6% the city. Among the three schools, Yellowwood has the highest percentage of girls with a private school primary education background.

5.3.1.2 Parental profiles
The family profiles deepen our understanding of the social contexts that girls come from. These are the environments that shape girls educational experiences and influence their educational choices.

The parental profile at Yellowwood shows that the majority of the girls in FIII and FIV come from rural homes with two parents and more than two siblings. A small percentage of mothers (3.4%) and fathers (6.5%) are within the 31-35 age range. They are young to have teenage children but judging from the mother’s age range, it is likely that the daughters were born when they themselves were barely out of their teenage years. This would mean that the mothers got pregnant in high school or immediately after high school or their first year of college or university (compare with Fort Hall in section 6.3.1 and Dominican in section 7.3.1). This data illustrates that teenage pregnancy/early motherhood is a reality within the schooling experiences of the girls. It affirms studies like Mensch et al. (1999) that indeed pregnancy and early motherhood is interruptive on girls’ education. All the same, the outstanding question is, what the implications of this are on the schooling of girls in Yellowwood.
The majority of fathers, 72.7%, are aged between 41 to 55 years. The majority of mothers, 68.6% fall in the 36-45 range. Generally, mothers are young, between 31 and 45 years. However, a small number (23.5%) falls between 46 and 60 years as compared with 46.5% of fathers in the same range. The school has a few parents aged 56 and above and the majority are fathers (6.9%) rather than mothers (2.9%).

In terms of marital status, 85.1% of mothers and 82.9% of fathers are married. Single mothers account for 5.7%, widows 5.2%, separated and divorced mothers 1.1%. Collectively, the counts of single mothers are low (13.1%) in this school compared with Fort Hall (21%) but the percentage is close to that found in Dominican (11.7%). Single fathers are a negligible 0.6% while widowed, separated and divorced fathers’ account for less than 1.5 % collectively.

As already mentioned, the average number of children per family is four. The percentage is highest among those with three (41%), four (40%) and five (45%) children. Among these families 40.4% have between one and two children in secondary school. One third of the families have more than one child in secondary, in fact 13.9% have between three and four children in secondary school, which is a large number for any family considering that secondary education in Kenya is fee-paying. Studies have found that that school fees often determine the kind of education that one can access and that there can be serious financial implications on girls’ education particularly where family finances are reduced (Makau, 1993; Nkabine, 1997; Gordon, et al., 1998).

It is apparent that for the majority of families the responsibility of school fees payment lies with the father (54%) and the mother and father together (20.7%). However, in this school, there is evidence that these finances are somewhat stretched because the burden is shared out among other family members such as siblings 2.7%, guardians 4.3%and relatives and other sponsors 0.5%. There is also indication that 15.8% of mothers bear the responsibility alone. The cost of education in Kenya like many countries in sub-Saharan Africa is known to militate against female participation in school. For girls in single-sex schools, this cost is even higher because of the additional costs for boarding and personal maintenance. Surviving four years of secondary education without financial hitches is therefore likely especially because salaries are low and the cost of education continues to rise.
School fees are government regulated but vary by form and decrease with each successive year. In Yellowwood the fee varies but it does decrease by FIV. At the time fieldwork was undertaken, school fees in FI were Kenyan shillings Ksh 28,300, in FII Ksh 24,590, in FIII Ksh 25,255 and in FIV Ksh 26,005.

Of the 167 parents that responded to the question asking about the annual cost on their daughter’s education at Yellowwood 13.2% indicated that they spend Ksh 20,000 (US$ 250). For 60.5% also the majority, the cost is Ksh 30,000 (US$ 375). 16.2% spend Ksh 40,000 (US$500) and the remaining 10.8% Ksh 50,000 (US$625) and above. Although parents spend similar amounts of money in all three schools (see section 6.3.1 and section 7.3.1) it is worth noting that over 80% of the parents in Yellowwood spend over Ksh 30,000 (US$375) on their daughters schooling in FIII and FIV. This figure is above that set by the government. It shows that there are additional costs that are not included in government estimates. The comparatively higher cost is attributable to the broad school curriculum offered in Yellowwood. Subjects like Art and Design, Music and Home Science cost more because they require extra learning resources, for there are additional charges made to parents. There are few schools that offer Art and Design and Music. These schools are perceived to be expensive even though what they broaden opportunities, especially for girls.

In conclusion and in terms of family stability at least 80% of the girls in Yellowwood are from ‘proper families’ or ‘stable’ two-parent homes with an average of four children. While fathers emerge as responsible for schools fees, the burden is shared among members of the family. This background is important because it has implications on the education choices that girls make given that parents are role models who play an important role in their daughter’s education whether or not it is pronounced. The same is the case of older siblings.

5.3.1.3 Education profiles in the family

As already mentioned the education of parents and siblings is significant in the context of girls’ education because it is the immediate context that girls see, relate to and draw from outside school.

All 184 girls that completed the student questionnaire have brothers (74.9%) and/or sisters (69.1%) taking primary and secondary education. But only some have siblings taking post secondary education, which like primary and secondary education differs by gender.
Among siblings 23.3% sisters and 14.2% brothers have a college education but for university education it is a low 7.6% for the girls and 10.9% for the boys. For siblings taking post secondary education, the data suggests that even though there are more females 23.4% than males 14.2% taking college level education, male’s access university education in greater numbers than females. The data also seems to suggest that males secure better qualifications, which enable them to make better access than females. The question to ask is why girls settle for college level education.

In Kenya, a college education is loaded with a variety of meanings. A college education ranges from certificate courses specialising in trade level skills like dressmaking and hairdressing to diploma courses in teaching and nursing. With the growth of ICTs, college education has also grown to include basic computer skills like the mastery of computer packages. For females who fail to secure university entrance qualifications, there is an array of alternatives at the college level. College level education is the more accessible post secondary education in Kenya. While, it is not the ideal, it is the reality and a reason why female enrolment at this level of education is high (see section 8.4.1)

The pattern in parent’s education in this school is distinctly different from that found in Fort Hall and Dominican in terms of the level of attainment (see section 6.3.2 and section 7.3.2). Mothers with no education at all account for 4.3% for and fathers 1.6%. Among parents with only a primary school education mothers account for 19.0 % for and fathers 13.0%. Beyond primary school, more mothers (25.5%) than fathers (14.7%) have a secondary level education. Higher up the education ladder there appears to be gender equality as fathers account for 45.7% and mothers 45.1% of parents with a college level education. However, at university the drop is drastic as only 4.3 % of mothers have a university education compared with 18.5 % of fathers. The majority of mothers belong to an age group (30s and 40s) that has always had access to university education (in that they were not barred from entry), but the majority seem to have failed to access it. It can be concluded then, that in this school, university education is elusive for both mothers and female siblings.

This pattern can be linked to several things besides a gendered socialization (see details section 8.2.3.1; 8.2.4; 8.3.1; 8.4.1). On the whole the pattern appears to suggest that university education is less accessible, perhaps even of less importance compared with primary and secondary education. However, the data show that access for mothers is problematic at both ends of the education spectrum i.e. primary and university. It warrants one to question what
the implications on single-sex education might be in terms of making access to university education easier? And in as far as Yellowwood is concerned, there is one question; what does this pattern point to as regards education in this leading girls’ school?

5.3.1.4 Employment profiles in the family
So far the data shows that the majority of parents in Yellowwood have attained some level of education. The logical outcome of education is employment. In this school, the type of employment varies just as the levels of education do.

Collectively, parents and siblings in all three schools are located within 31 different professions. As has been mentioned before, parents and siblings who are also professionals serve as examples and role models. In this school, there is evidence of this relationship even though the example of siblings is somewhat perceived with uncertainty. Only 25.4% of the girls in Yellowwood wish to follow the example of their siblings, 26.5% do not and 48.1% are unsure. A close examination of parents’ and siblings’ professions helps to explain why this is the case.

Mothers in this school engage in 18 different types of professions, 32.4% are within the public sector, 8.1% the private sector and 31.2% in self-employment. The leading professions are teaching (32.6%), business (14.7%), farming (7.6%), housewifery (6.5%) and nursing (4.3%). A negligible percentage is in secretarial (2.2%), tailoring (2.2%) and banking (1.6%). Not all mothers are perceived as ‘professionals’. A 21% is unaccounted suggesting that they have no profession or else that the girls found it difficult to articulate what their mothers do in terms of the question asked in the questionnaire, ‘what profession is your mother/father in?’ (see Appendix A). Given that these mothers were alive at the time of the study, the latter is a likely reason for this omission.

The employment for fathers follows a similar pattern; however, here the variety of professions extends to 21 including: teaching (28.8%) business (15.2%), administration and management (6.5%), farming (3.3%), finance and accounting (2.7%), engineering (2.2%), law (1.6%), nursing (1.6%), medicine (1.1%) and pharmacy (1.1%). Again 23.9% are unaccounted for. The misinterpretation of the question applies to 23.9% of whom there is no account.

With the exception of teaching, which is the profession of 8.2% of sisters and 2.7% of brothers, the other professions constitute negligible percentages. The sisters are mainly in
secretarial (3.8%), nursing (2.7%), administration and management (1.6%), accounting (1.6%), medicine (1.6%) and catering (1.1%). For brothers it is medicine (2.7%), engineering (5.5%), accounting (1.7%), administration and management (2.2%) and information technology (1.1%). Unlike the female siblings, male siblings are in information technology and engineering related careers.

The similarity between mothers’ and fathers’ professions is characteristic of rural folk where teaching is one of the few professional options. It is interesting that teaching is the leading profession among siblings. With limited options and few career opportunities it is a plausible explanation that teaching is a career that siblings find themselves in out of limited career options, however it is also possible that there is parental influence in the choice.

Closely related to family career profiles is the question of role model. Mothers, fathers, and siblings fall in the category of ‘significant role models’. These include members of the immediate and extended family, associates, public figures and career people who from the data constitute 78.9%. Other role models include members of the teaching staff (3.9%), fellow students (8.9%) and the school principal (7.2%). Only 1.1% of the girls indicated that they had no role model.

5.3.2 A PROFILE OF GIRLS’ EDUCATION CHOICES
Perceptions about education, subject preferences in higher education and career aspirations are important aspects of the schooling process. In this section descriptive statistics are used to discuss the patterns and trends and the interrelationship among these aspects within the context of girls’ education at Yellowwood.

5.3.2.1 Yellowwood: The school of choice
In terms of their perception of the school, Yellowwood Girls High School is the school of choice for 72.3% of the girls. The minority (27.2%) that indicated the contrary came to the school on the advice of parents, relatives or former primary school teachers.

Yellowwood is also the school of choice for the majority (83.8%) of parents. Yellowwood is a provincial school and the data show that less than a third of mothers (27.2%) received their schooling in a similar school. The majority attended district (29.5%) and Harambee (18.5%) secondary schools. Their experiences explain their preference and perceptions of the school; “Yellowwood has good academic performance”, “it offers better educational opportunities
and a better future”. For these mothers the school is synonymous with education opportunity: it is the kind of school that that offers a better education to their daughters than they had.

### 5.3.2.2 Experiencing education in the school of choice

The schooling experience is created through engagement in academic work and non-academic activities. The overall nature of such an experience contributes to the meanings and perceptions a student makes of education and especially the choices made. Asked about their experiences of eight academic and non-academic school activities, a majority (66.8%) indicated that they found their academic studies very enjoyable, 23.6% quite enjoyable and 8.2% enjoyable. A negligible 1.6% said they found their academic studies “quite boring” and none for “very boring”.

Academic work is primarily about study. Prep or unsupervised private study is an important academic programme in most Kenyan boarding schools. It is programmed into every day of the week including the weekend as a means to consolidate classroom learning. The experience and perceptions of prep are telling of the academic culture in a school. In this school 14.5% indicated that they find prep enjoyable, a small 4.5% find it quite boring and a negligible 0.6% find it very boring. Although prep is not a favourite school programme, perhaps because of the self-discipline it requires, the percentage of girls that perceive it negatively is negligible as compared to percentage (80.5%) that find it an enjoyable school. This shows that Yellowwood has a good academic culture and girls that girls have the discipline to work on their own.

Non-academic activities or extra-curricula activities such as sports, clubs and societies develop skills, talents and gifts. One-third (35.5%) indicated that they find games and sports very enjoyable and another 44.2% enjoyed clubs and societies. Only a minority (7.7%) indicated that they found games and sports quite boring. For clubs and societies it was only 3.3%. Even fewer find games and sports (1.1%) or clubs and societies (2.8%) very boring.

Clearly, non-academic activities are thriving in Yellowwood and there is regard and value for them. While this could be explained by the fact that the school has well-maintained sporting facilities, it is the teachers who are the motivating factor. The teachers are not only trained in physical education but I observed that they are keen and willing to coach the girls in games and sport. Because of this, the girls participate in sporting activities after school and over the
weekends. For those who are very keen the school has teams involved in competitive league sports all the year round.

5.3.2.3 Key players inside the school of choice

Single-sex boarding schools are supposed to be homes away from home. For this reason, the boarding school has a family culture. Yellowwood has both male and female teachers, which has implications on the nature of the relationships among members of the Yellowwood family. Teachers perpetuate or change traditions, foster continuity and inculcate values that to some extent contribute to the well-being and settledness of girls in a school. In a boarding school they bear roles from class teacher, to club patron to sports coach. Students also have their roles, they are all peers and at the same time classmates, dormitory mates, desk mates and even prefects. In boarding schools, the responsibility of parenting is often relegated to members of staff. They become ‘parents’ over and above being teachers, mentors and role models. Because these are key players in girls’ education, the perceptions that girls have of them and what they do is important in as far as girls educational experiences is concerned and perceptions of education are concerned.

Girls will perceive teachers and fellow students differently depending on the relationship and the relevance of the role to them. The majority (80.3%) indicated that the school principal was very supportive, 0.5% found her not supportive, but because there was no indication of her being unsupportive, this case was taken to be an exception.

Class teachers are also mentors and counsellors. Slightly more than half the girls (57.9%) indicated that they were very supportive, 26.8% quite supportive and 10.9% supportive. Only 3.8 and 0.5% indicated that they find class teachers hardly supportive and not supportive respectively. Once again, the latter is likely to be an exceptional case.

The difference in the support girls received from male and female teachers was small. Both male (41.2%) and female teachers (41.9%) were found to be very supportive. Under quite supportive the range was again close, for males (34.6%) and females (31.8%) and equal for supportive (20%). Collectively only 3.2% of the girls indicated that their male teachers were hardly supportive and not supportive at all as compared to the higher 6.1 % reported for female teachers.
This data confirms that female teachers are supportive of girls in their education. However, with the higher percentage of unsupportive teachers being female (6.1%) it is important to probe why these few female teachers fail to render the support that is assumed to be automatic for female teachers in all girls schools.

For club patrons and games coaches the support varied between very supportive and supportive depending on the level to which girls participated in the related activity.

As already mentioned, student also take on multiple roles. These strengthen or weaken their schooling experiences depending on the role the student takes and the closeness and significance of that role to the student’s well-being. A third of the girls (36.3%) indicated that they found their classmates very supportive as compared to prefects (23.2%) or even other students (20.8%). Interestingly, the majority (81.2%) of girls rate prefects as plainly supportive which points to a rather detached relationship. Further detachment from these students in positions of leadership is evident among 18.8% who perceive prefects as being hardly supportive and not supportive at all. This perception is supported by the 14.8% who perceive the larger body of students in their school as hardly supportive and not supportive at all.

This data clearly show that classmates are the more supportive group of the three categories of schoolmates. Unlike fellow students and prefects who are in the distance, classmates are peers and in close proximity. They create and contribute to everyday experiences through shared classes, lessons and friendships. For boarding schools, such experiences extend to the dormitories, sports and clubs. Unlike prefects who bear dual and sometimes conflicting roles of student and administrator, classmates are neutral in the hierarchy of school authority, which explains the reason why the majority of students describe them as simply supportive.

With respect to Yellowwood as a learning environment, the data show that both students and parents perceive the school as an ideal learning environment and not only because of its physical facilities. For the majority of girls it is the school of choice so they find support in the school principal, teachers and fellow students. They also participate in and enjoy a variety of school activities that the literature on single-sex education (see details in section 3.5) describes as appropriate for fostering healthy relationships, building confidence and high self-esteem. Such environments are also claimed to be ideal for inculcating high educational aspirations and academic achievement. This notwithstanding, the question that still stands of
these three schools is, do girls in these schools hold high educational aspirations? If yes, why? If no, why not?

5.3.3 A PROFILE ON EDUCATIONAL CHOICES AND ASPIRATIONS

The data shows that girls in this school have high aspirations for higher education. The majority (96.2%) want to pursue university education. Only a very small minority (3.8%) intend to take their education only up to college level and not a single girl wants to remain with only secondary level education. If performance in national examinations is anything to go by then these aspirations reflect attainable goals. The teachers at Yellowwood displayed varying perceptions of why girls hold such high education aspirations primarily because they teach different subjects, which yield different kinds of experiences for girls even though the girls are the same. In their responses to the open question, “what are your experiences of teaching girls?” they pointed to girls’ abilities and seemed to agree that the girls have “potential” and are “hard working and capable”.

The “potential” was confirmed by schools university admission history. On average at least 180 take KCSE in a given year. In the last ten years (between 1990/1991 and 2001/ 2000 academic years) this adds up to approximately 2,160 girls (see Appendix T). Of this number only 362 or 16% have been admitted to public universities. Considering that the 8-4-4 system of education is designed to be inclusive in terms of opportunities for girls (see 2.3.2) this figure is low for a leading provincial school where potential has been identified. It is a pattern that is suggestive of a great gap between the ideal and the reality in as far as female aspirations for higher education are concerned (see section 8.4.1).

The socio-economic well-being of women is linked to the number of years that they attend school. The pattern above occurs in a single-sex girl’s school. It suggests that there are barriers that hinder the actualisation of girls’ aspirations for university education even in what is thought to be a ‘protected’ school environment. Given that the pattern is repeated, it seems as if the barriers might be intrinsic, i.e. they emanate from within the girls themselves. There is little that a single-sex education can do besides appear to challenge such barriers.

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9 National Examination league tables are a media creation. At the beginning of each year when the national KCSE examination results are announced, schools are scored by their mean mark. Various categories are used to list the top hundred e.g. overall top hundred schools, top hundred national school, top hundred provincial school, top hundred district schools and top hundred male and female students.
FIII and FIV are fairly mature secondary school students and one would assume that their educational choices have been seriously thought over. Moreover given that subject choices were already made at the outset of the study, it is difficult not to question why there are so many unrealised aspirations in a school that appears to be doing well academically.

5.3.3.1 Subject choices and preferences
Yellowwood offers 15 subjects in FI and FII. Of these, 10 are compulsory and 5 electives. In FIII and FIV 15 subjects are also offered but the compulsory subjects decrease to 4 and the electives increase to 11. The advantage of attending school in Yellowwood is that one is able to access a wide range of subjects. This is designed to cater for different abilities and talents (see Appendix L).

Subject selection is finalised at the beginning of FIII, which also marks the commencement of the syllabus examinable under the KCSE. Once KCSE registration has taken place at the beginning of FIII the choices are permanent. The selection of subject electives is a serious process and Yellowwood follows a rigorous process that involves parents among other stakeholders. Parents are required to give signed consent to their daughter’s choices. The vast majority (96.4%) indicated that they were consulted but whether or not they actually help their daughters to arrive at an informed decision is another matter. More importantly there are implications to this on higher education and career aspirations. In fact, whether or not parents are consulted or make meaningful input is not the point here as it is girls’ experiences of the subject electives and the considerations leading to their choices that we are looking at.

School subjects increase or decrease educational opportunities as far as higher education and careers are concerned. As such, the perception that stakeholders have on the matter is important because they are the ones who can motivate for change. In Yellowwood, 82.9% of the parents indicated that the school had a good variety of subjects. Only 17.1% indicated otherwise. The majority of parents (79.3%) indicated satisfaction with the number of subjects, however, a minority (15.4%) indicated interest in having foreign languages taught.

Over two thirds of the girls (69.2%) award some value to school subjects while a third (30.8%) do not. Table 5.2 shows by percentage the “favourite”, “worst” and “important” subjects. The favourite subjects in order of preference are Biology (32.6%), Mathematics (21.2%), History (9.2%), Geography (7.1%) and English (7.1%). The worst subjects are
Physics (14.8%), History (13.1%) Home Science (7.1%) and Mathematics (6.0%). The preferences match the overall subject enrolment pattern (see Table 5.3). And while there is no way of determining whether or not all the preferences correspond to the subjects that students currently take, what the students think of the subjects serves to show how strongly they feel about them. The patterns that emerge explain why some subjects are over enrolled, others under enrolled and even ‘dying’.

**TABLE 5.1: YELLOWWOOD: SUBJECT ENROLMENT IN FIII &FIV BY NUMBER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Kiswahili</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Biology</th>
<th>Physics</th>
<th>Chemistry</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>CRE</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Home Science</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Art &amp; Design</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Typing &amp; Office Practice</th>
<th>Computer Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIII</td>
<td>(181)</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIV</td>
<td>(186)</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes subjects that are compulsory in the school

At the time of the study (see Table 5.1 above) English, Kiswahili, Mathematics and Chemistry were compulsory subjects in FIII and FIV. The electives were dropped or taken in accordance with student preferences, teacher availability and subject cluster groups (see Appendix N).
In Yellowwood, the availability of teachers is not a problem and students’ preferences are respected, however the majority rule applies when it comes to subject combination and where students’ choices fail to fit in the ‘mainstream’ pattern – which is different each year. The ‘outliers’ are forced to merge with the ‘majority’.

Subject preference patterns vary with school. In terms of subject value, a quarter (27.6 %) of the girls place equal value on the subjects they take, which shows non-bias. A similar percentage (29.5%) does not have a “worst” subject, which is an indication that perceptions towards subjects are individual as much as they can be overwhelmingly peer driven. In this school mathematics is an important subject for nearly one-third (30.4%) of the girls in Yellowwood along with Biology (18.2%), which is the favourite subject for 32.6%. For Chemistry, also a compulsory science subject, ambivalence is evident in the relatively small percentage of girls that consider it a favourite subject (4.9%), a worst subject (5.5%) or even an important subject (2.2%). Female learners are known to hold negative perceptions about mathematics, but in this school, the subject appears to have positive value (see Table 5.2). This is in contrast with the perceptions held in Fort Hall and Dominican where less than 10% of the students consider mathematics a favourite subject (see Table 6.2 and Table 7.3).
The preference patterns also show a link between perception and perceived ability. As shown in Table 5.2 Mathematics and Biology are highly favoured and important subjects in Yellowwood yet Physics, an analytical subject that requires a substantial amount of mathematical knowledge is in the category of “worst” subject. Only 97 students study Physics out of the 367 students in FIII and FIV (see Table 5.1). For a leading provincial girl’s school with qualified teachers, a modern physics laboratory, and thriving in-service training for teachers of mathematics and science, the number of girls taking Physics is very low. It is wasteful of resources and opportunity. Moreover, for a school that places importance on Mathematics ahead of Biology, which is regarded as a ‘soft science subject’, it is difficult to explain the negative perception, more especially when science congress (a science-related school programme) enjoys a relatively high rating (59.4%) as “very enjoyable”.

Home Science, Typing and Office Practice and Christian Religious Education are, according to the literature, favourites among female students. They do for girls what sciences do for boys. However, the patterns emerging in Yellowwood seem to suggest otherwise. Though the school has a large and very well-equipped teaching complex for Home Science, the subject is not perceived as important. It is hardly a favourite subject (2.2%), rather it is the worst subject for 7.1% coming close to Physics! Considering that only 34 out of a possible 367 students take the subject, questions need to be asked as to how much of a ‘girl subject’ it really is. The same dismissive attitude applies to Agriculture. Only 0.5% perceive it a favourite subject. For 1.6% it is the worst subject. None of the 367 students consider it important, which for girls from a predominantly rural background is peculiar given that agriculture is familiar.

Like Home Science and Agriculture, Typing and Office Practice is a ‘dying’ subject with a lot of resources being waste. Besides very low enrolment (15 girls), it is perceived neither as a favourite nor important subject. These three subjects fall under the category of applied technical subjects in the national curriculum. Given that these are the kinds of subjects that the 8-4-4 system uses to instil the knowledge and skills that foster an education of self-reliance, one wonders why they are rejected in a leading girls' school like Yellowwood. Barriers and attitudes and perceptions exist long before the actual choice of a subject is made, so it useful to examine what the implications are in terms of girls’ prospects for higher education and opportunities in technical related careers.
Languages are also claimed to be subjects that female student find favourable. Considering the widespread usage of the Kiswahili language under the 8-4-4 system the percentage of girls who consider it a favourite subject (2.2%) or even an important one is small (0.6%). The perception is different for English which is both a favourite (7.1%) and important (6.1%) by a close margin and the worst subject for 2.7%. It is likely that the subject enjoys an evaluated status over Kiswahili because it is compulsory and the language of instruction in secondary school.

At the time of this study, Computer Studies was a new subject on the curriculum at Yellowwood. All students were being oriented to it for that year. It was for this reason not listed among the subject electives in FIII. There was an indication of interest in the subject. Many girls going through orientation expressed the desire to take the subject at KCSE.

5.3.3.2 Career aspirations: The choices, the reasons, the perceptions

Girls in Yellowwood are ambitious; they aspire to pursue a wide range of careers of the 39 cited collectively by girls in the three schools. The girls of this school cite 26 and the leading five are human medicine (32.2%), law (16.4%), engineering (12.5%), nursing (7.1%), pharmacy (6.0%), psychiatry and psychology (1.6%).

Human medicine is perceived as a career of high status and some of the reasons given for the choice include a generous remuneration:

- Earn a lot of money for daily bread and leisure
- Has a lot of income

Service to the community is the motivating factor behind the choice of medicine, nursing and pharmacy. It shows an awareness of and willingness to respond to dire needs in the community:

- I would like to help people with heart problems
- To help those who are dying because of shortage of doctors and money
- Fight various diseases which have (sic) reduce us to poverty
- Help abandoned young babies

Role models influence career aspirations in medicine. For others it is childhood dreams and the challenge of pursuing a difficult career:

- I like biology and admire doctors since I was small
Follow my role model Ben Carson
I have admired a family friend who is doing surgery at university
Has been my dream since childhood

In terms of employability, medicine is not a competitive career in Kenya. With this guaranteed for some girls, aspirations are based on such pragmatics, “medicine has no competition unlike others … not many people want the profession.” For others, the choice of a medical career is linked to attitude and performance in science subjects:

- I am very good in biology and love anything to do with the human body
- I do well in science and also like it

A career that guarantees financial security and independence is highly rated by the girls. Like medicine and law the perception that engineering is a career offering high remuneration is among the reasons cited for the choice:

- It earns a lot of money and I believe I can make it
- I like its uniqueness and I know you can be financially stable through it
- To earn money and have a comfortable life

The fact that 12.5% of the girls are interested in engineering is significant when account is taken of the number of girls taking Physics. This positive attitude indicates a breaking of the barriers that hold girls back from careers that have been considered a male domain. The opportunity to apply knowledge and good performance in science subjects is the motivating reason for the choice. While this is a different kind of attitude it is bold and it shows a critical understanding and engagement with the subject:

- I perform fairly well in physics, chemistry and mathematics
- I like working with machines and I would also like to make a car one day
- Know how to produce goods from raw materials

Those with career aspirations in architecture (2.7%), computer science and information technology (1.1%) aviation, meteorology and land survey (0.5%) are few in number and against what is normal for girls. One of the three girls that want a career in aviation is motivated by gender equality:

- … want to challenge men

The future architects want the career because of the remuneration and their perceived abilities to manage the course:

- It interest my heart and it is good earning
- Love coming up with things on my own like design a particular house
One girl linked architecture to drawing, which is an interesting conceptualisation of the requirements albeit a deceptive one which points to the misguided ways that careers are framed:

I am talented in drawing

Information technology is a vibrant and expanding industry that offers high paying career opportunities but all of this appears unclear to the girls in Yellowwood. The girls are unable to differentiate between computer studies as a science, a technical or utility skill and a business enterprise. The fuzziness can be attributed to erroneous or insufficient information and poor exposure:

My dad sells them [computers] and I am inspired
I have longed to venture in this field as I have seen many people succeed in it; there is a great conviction in me about it

Over two-thirds of the girls take Commerce (see Table 5.1) and while mathematics is a favourite subject as well as important subject in the school, the interest in business and finance based careers is rather low for related careers like accounting (4.9%), banking (2.2%), business management (1.6%), journalism (2.1%), and public relations (0.5%).

Those that aspire to become journalists link it to choice and language proficiency:

Good in languages … I do well in Swahili and Fasihi
Admire those in that profession
I love journalists and I like to travel the world reporting what is happening

The service industry is where the majority of Kenyan women finally end up but in this school there is disinterest in related careers except for those linked to the tourism industry such as tours and travel (1.6%) and hotel management (1.6%), secretarial (0.5%) and airhostess (0.5%). The motivating reason is simple: “my dream is to serve people’s needs.” For others within the same category the choice motivated by the career itself:

Gain self-confidence (Public relations)
I like singing (Musician)

Other career interests worth mentioning include interior design (0.5%) and fashion and design (0.5%). The interest shown probably emanates from learning Art and Design, which is offered in Yellowwood. Interestingly, girls in Fort Hall indicate interest in the same career even though the subject is not offered in their school (see 6.4.4).
A significant percentage of girls aspire to pursue a career in law (16.4%). However, those that want a career in law do not link their choice to good academic performance in related subjects like History and Geography (see Table 5.3) or the positive value for the subject (see Table 5.2). Rather the aspiration is motivated by prospects of a high remuneration and the perception that it is a suitable profession for women:

Ladies like this profession … it is also well paid
Maintain justice and earn a lot of money

For others, law is seen as a means to female empowerment and the administration of justice, including “solving the cases for the less fortunate” and being “interested in fighting human rights”. Like medicine, pursuing law would be a career dream come true for aspirations sowed early in childhood:

My dream since I was a kid
I’ve been interested in becoming a lawyer since primary school

Several girls cited degree courses for career aspirations. This is a confusion that points to the quality of information accessible to students in and out of school. It is also a pointer to the quality of career guidance in schools and the confusion between university degrees and careers.

I want to be something more than my parents (Bachelor of Commerce degree)

Very few girls in Yellowwood aspire to become teachers (0.5%). This is the career of the majority of their parents and siblings and like agricultural based careers (0.5%) is shunned in this school (see Appendix N).

The girls’ careers preferences in this school are clustered around one type of career, which indicates several things about the girls. Though the girls make a logical link between their aspirations and the subjects they study, it is quite clear from the choice of human medicine – the choice of one third of girls (32.2%) – that a social reinforcement is at play. The following factors point to this:

1. The merit examination based education system awards high and low value to some degree courses. Admission into a medical degree requires top grade marks in KCSE so it is also elevated as a career. From the choices discussed above, it is evident that a medical career is the ultimate career aspiration.
2. The choice of medical related careers is reinforced by role models whose lifestyles are high profile and enviable. The social and economic capital linked to this career also makes it appealing.

3. Poor health care facilities particularly in rural areas appear to motivate a social response to dire need.

While the desire for prestige, financial security and social standing are not unusual, the recurrence among a significant third of the sampled population raises questions about career counselling at the school. Besides idealism, there is naivety of other options outside medicine and law. More evidence is seen in student and teacher perceptions on career guidance.

A large 81.8% of the teachers indicate that career guidance is an effective school programme even though their involvement in it does not correspond accordingly. Just about half the teacher (51.5%) are involved in career guidance. A very small 9.0% is “highly involved” while more than a quarter of the teachers (27.2%) are “hardly involved” and “not involved at all” (15.15%). Ironically, the same teachers indicate the need for a more vigorous career guidance programme as a means to improving girls’ educational opportunities! The level of teacher involvement for a school of the calibre of Yellowwood suggests that career guidance is not taken seriously enough.

The repercussions of poor guidance are somewhat evident in the nature of career choices. The choice of careers in medicine and law follows the stereotype ‘revered career’ pattern while lack of interest in agriculture related careers suggests a desire to become de-linked with ‘rurality’. The little display of interest in science and technology suggests that some girls are considering and even embracing other career aspirations. The interest shown in fashion design and interior design also shows a similar type of thinking. In this particular case it is an indication that girls are aware of alternatives to ‘regular/normal’ careers. In this school, it is an option that one could link to the subjects taken in school.

5.3.3.3 “My aspirations for my daughter”: Parents career preferences

Yellowwood parents’ are on the whole split as far as satisfaction with their daughter academic performance is concerned. Only half (50.6%) of the parents indicated satisfaction. Their perceptions of their daughters’ academic performance varied from excellent (14.4%) to good (51.5%) to average (32.9%) to poor (1.2%). This notwithstanding, the parents also indicated what appears to be a close similarity between their own career choices for their daughters and
the choices of their daughters. Out of 152 and 145 responses from mothers and fathers respectively 35.5% of the mothers and 20.7% of fathers desire careers in human medicine for their daughters.

The other leading careers favoured by mothers are law (14.5%), nursing (10.5%), teaching (6.6%), engineering (6.6%) and accounting (3.3%). For fathers it is law (13.8%), engineering (9.0%), nursing (6.5%), teaching (4.1%), accounting (3.4%) and information technology (3.4%).

These preferences challenge gendered connotations in female careers more especially when both mothers and fathers aspire that their daughters pursue careers in male-dominated careers like science and technology. The preference for engineering by mothers (6.6%) and fathers (9.0%) and accounting by mothers (3.3%) and fathers (3.4%) indicates that these parents desire their daughters to enter male-dominated fields.

It is noteworthy that a relatively high percentage of mothers (14.5%) and fathers (13.8%) that opt for law. This choice matches that of the girls and from the reasons motivating their choice of nursing and teaching, it appears that parents perceive law as a suitable career for women. Generally, there is a display of progressive thinking as far as career choices among parents in this school is concerned. However, the progressiveness is entrenched in a discourse that views some careers as better suited to women. Given that Yellowwood is a single-sex school, one would expect to find more parents identifying themselves with education as able to offer opportunities which are equal and not bound by gender.

Uncertainty about higher education prospects came out in the data. A small percentage of mothers (3.3%) and fathers (13.8%) indicated that their daughters’ career decisions would be delayed until KCSE results were received. This ‘wait and see’ position can be linked to the fact that fathers more than mothers hold the responsibility of paying for education (see section 5.3.1.2). Given that the girls come from families with up to four children, this precautionary measure is really one of pragmatics most likely necessitated by scarce family resources.

5.3.4 THE ‘WHAT IS?’ IN YELLOWWOOD GIRLS SCHOOL: A SUMMARY

So far this chapter has presented girls’ educational choices as far as school subjects, higher education and careers aspirations are concerned. This summarises the ‘what is?’ question to
this study by consolidating these three features against girls schooling experiences and perceptions of single-sex education.

5.3.4.1 Who attends all girls’ schools?

1. The majority of girls (67.7%) are from rural backgrounds, though those from an urban background are the minority, they constitute a significant 22.3%.
2. The majority received a rural primary education but there is a significant percentage with private school primary education.
3. The majority is from two parent families with at least four children. The majority of parents are married but there are a notable percentage of single mothers.
4. The cost of school fees for the majority is Ksh 30,000 (US$ 375). Fathers hold the responsibility of paying school fees, followed by a combined team of mothers and fathers and mothers that are on their own. Relatives also bear some responsibility.
5. The majority are from homes with parents who have secondary and college level education. Generally, the majority of mothers have secondary level education and below while fathers have secondary education and above. Fewer mothers than fathers have a university education.
6. The majority of parents are in the teaching profession, business for both parents, housewifery and farming for mothers.
7. Girls are from homes where the majority of female siblings have college level education but more males than females have university level education.
8. Working siblings are mainly in the teaching profession.

5.3.4.2 Girls’ view of single-sex education

1. Yellowwood is a well-established, well-managed, well-equipped school with qualified and experienced male and female teachers.
2. Yellowwood is the school of choice for the majority of girls and their parents. Among the latter, half are satisfied with their daughters’ academic performance while the other half are unsatisfied.
3. The majority of parents believe the school offers better educational opportunities than they had when they were in school.
4. The majority of girls enjoy most of the academic and non-academic school activities.
5. The girls find the school principal, teachers and fellow students supportive. There is not much difference between the support received from male and female teachers, even though the latter are more inclined to be unsupportive.
6. Classmates are the most supportive of the student groups.
5.3.4.3 Girls’ choices and preferences with regard to school subjects

1. All girls have favourite subjects. The majority do not have subjects they consider “worst” or “important”.
2. Mathematics and Biology are both favourite and important subjects.
3. Physics is the worst the subject.
4. Agriculture, Typing and Office Practice and Home Science are ‘dying’ subjects.
5. Like their parents, the girls are satisfied with the school curriculum but they would like to have foreign languages included.

5.3.4.4 Girls’ aspirations for higher education

1. The majority aspire to pursue a university level education, and at the very least a college level education.

5.3.4.5 Girls’ career aspirations

1. Even though the majority of role models are members within the immediate and extended family there is ambivalence in following the example of siblings. There is similarity between girls own career aspirations and those of their parents.
2. Girls want well-paying high profile careers and have a keen interest in medical related careers like medicine, nursing and pharmacy, also law and engineering and to a lesser extent accounting.
3. Some career aspirations were sowed in childhood, others by role models and others by the call to social responsibility.

5.4 EMERGING THEMES: A DISCUSSION

This section is drawn out of qualitative data. The themes emerging respond to and interrogate the quantitative data findings.

5.4.1 ‘A RURAL SCHOOL?’ NOT A PROBLEM

The survey findings show that the majority of girls at Yellowwood are established in a rural set up in terms of home and schooling. Literature on rural education in sub-Saharan Africa depicts want and disadvantage but this is not the case in Yellowwood, at least not in terms of infrastructure and resources.

The fact that Yellowwood is a school located in a rural area does not stand in the way of girls’ educational aspirations. The summary below captures how girls perceive their schools:

Being in a rural school does not change what I want to be in the future because what I want to achieve is not hindered. I get all that I need in this school. It does not matter if it is rural or not. I have teachers, I
have books, I have the activities. If you feel stress you join activities, there are outings and things to see that you do not know (Jacqueline FIV, Yellowwood)

The education that is offered here is the same as in other schools. We have big and important people in the society who come from these schools just like any other school in urban centres (Marion FIII, Yellowwood).

The ‘rural factor’ is perceived as a favourable feature both by the students and staff of Yellowwood. In all the focus group discussions the girls spoke in defense of their school citing that they had all the learning facilities they needed; qualified and experienced teachers (see section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2). The quiet and spacious surroundings which girls perceive as conducive to learning and the boarding facilities are a bonus that city schools cannot enjoy. Given this extrinsic motivation then what hinders girls from great achievements in their education? Since Yellowwood is clearly not a disadvantaged rural institution, then what are the barriers hindering greater female participation and achievement in science subjects like physics? What are the barriers preventing more Yellowwood girls from achieving university level education or even taking the more prestigious male-dominated courses?

5.4.1.1 The social and cultural mindset vis-à-vis the education of women

The adverse effects of biased social, cultural and economic beliefs are known to militate against girls’ education. In single-sex schools like Yellowwood, boarding facilities mitigate the more overt effects but that is insufficient to protect them covert interference.

Unlike the girls, the teachers point to the covert effects. They argue that the rural factor somewhat undermines girls education potential. They point out that while it has little to with the outward physical amenities, the status of the school did not prevail upon the girls in terms of their mindset and outlook on education. In other words, though the girls are not in a rural school in terms of standard and resources, their minds appear shackled by their rural socialisation and upbringing.

Murang’a District is described as being ‘laid back’ in its attitude towards female education especially when compared to other districts in the province. As one teachers group pointed out the attitude of parents and students towards girls’ education is laid-back so that academic performance at the primary level is generally poor. Students from the district are known to gain admission in FI with relatively low marks as compared to students from other districts in
 provinces like Kirinyaga, Nyeri and Nyandarua. According to Mr G and Miss M the roots of this apathy are found within the social circles and especially within family attitudes:

... I have attended FI selection for a number of years now and I realise that the marks that these girls get in Murang’a at KCPE are very low compared to Nyeri. For instance Yellowwood, the marks that we get for our first girls are below what Ngandu [a leading girls' school in Nyeri district] gets for their last girls. Maybe it has to do with the attitude of parents in Murang’a towards girls’ education. Maybe they are not serious about it ... maybe parents do not regard education as very important. They are still living in the old age (Mr G, Yellowwood).

The blame is pointed to the family:

... this is contributed to by the attitudes to education of the parents and the students themselves.

I have seen even in primary schools, right from standard five the students have the habit of visiting the library in town [she is referring to Nyeri town] but here in Murang’a I am not aware of a national library. So when they come to high school they have nothing to do with the school library. So they do not spend time reading or studying so the education continues to be low (Mrs M, Yellowwood).

The observations of Mrs M – a teacher with 18 years experience – concur with those of the colleague cited earlier. While this might be a plausible explanation, the quality of female education cannot entirely be blamed on the students, as there is more to it than just the rural factor. In fact, these observations point to the development of girls’ education in Kenya (see details in Chapter 1).

Murang’a District is a district headquarters that has grown and expanded very slowly. Though modern amenities like a library do not necessary lead to improvement in the quality of education, the development of education in the district is slow. Like libraries, private schools also strengthen growth and expansion in education. According to the school principal, investment in private school education is not a significant development in Murang’a. In her opinion there has been very little investment in private education in the district perhaps because few people would want to invest in what is seemingly a forgotten district. Private education also improves the quality of education, particularly at the primary level where access is more acute. The lack of numerous private schools, as is the case in Nyeri and Kirinyaga, points to the value given to education.

Another perspective attributes the problem to gender inequality. In his observations, Mr N links the rurality mindset to parental attitudes and to broader societal attitudes and values about women:
In Murang’a there is too much tradition and cultural rootedness especially in the tea and coffee zones. Girls are encouraged to be domesticated. In my experience, I have seen for example if a parent has three children in secondary school, he will pay for the boys and then the girls later (Mr N, Yellowwood).

Mr N perceives the district as one entrenched in a conservative traditional and cultural rural livelihood. From his observations, culture, tradition and societal norms invariably govern education in ways that are covert but enduring because the thinking and mindset of a community becomes transferred to the individual.

With regard to girls’ educational choices and schooling in Yellowwood it would mean that though girls may secure access to a good education, access alone does not prevent the individual from settling for less than her potential allows. Though it is evident that Yellowwood is able to mitigate low education aspirations, how the society thinks about and frames female education is evident in some of the education choices girls make (see for example career choices in section 5.3.3.2). And while Yellowwood is not an extreme case compared with Dominican or Fort Hall where making a transition to university is concerned, the fact that less than a fifth of girls proceed with to a university level demonstrates the subtleties of education equity and gender equity within single-sex education. The notion that there are certain careers that are more favourable for women shows how easily the cultural subjugation of females is perpetrated within an education system that is supposed to challenge such thinking. In the light of this, the question has to be asked; what purpose does single-sex schooling serve if the factors that perpetuate female subjugation are able to penetrate through it?

5.4.2 ‘MY DREAM SCHOOL’: EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL OF CHOICE

Good educational facilities are almost a guarantee to good educational output and outcomes. Such facilities are found in ‘good schools’ like Yellowwood, which is the school of choice for the vast majority of the students in FIII and FIV. Since Yellowwood is self-made choice then there is a positive outlook about it, especially in terms of educational aspirations.

With the exception of four of the 48 girls that participated in focus groups interviews, Yellowwood is the school of choice and the school of their dreams:

This is the school of my dream because of its good performance and it has enough facilities for example we have qualified teachers, good laboratories (Lillian FIV, Yellowwood)
I had known from when I was a young girl that I liked Yellowwood Girls High School because of the good performance that they used to get. Now my dream was to come to Yellowwood because in our place if someone comes to Yellowwood you are considered great and people have hope in you. Now me from when I was in primary school, I used to like this school and this was my dream school to come to (Yvonne FIV, Yellowwood).

High academic achievement in national examinations is an important consideration that is made in primary school when applications for admission to secondary school are made. Yellowwood is renowned for its academic performance, which makes it the dream school for any girl in the district. There is unmistakable confidence that the school can deliver sound education and guarantee a future with good prospects:

I felt so good to be in this school because I know so many people that have passed through this school and they are big people in this country and so I am happy to be in this school. Some of them are lawyers, magistrates and others are in good careers and I admire to be like them (Beatrice FIII, Yellowwood).

Another strong influence on school choice is the family. There is an established family trend among families where female siblings have attended Yellowwood, and this has influenced some of the girls in their choice of the school:

Where I come from most of my aunts and rich cousins have passed through this school and they performed well. Even my sister was here and so I felt that if I come here and work as they did and perform as well as they did … they used to tell me that this school is good they provide everything your part is just to work hard (Jacqueline FIV, Yellowwood).

As pointed out before, the survey findings show that for 27.2% of the girls Yellowwood was a ‘forced’ choice. This minority group represent a different view about the school. Below, Rhoda illustrates the consequences of rejecting the school. The role of parents and other influential people in bringing about confidence is evidently crucial when settling down becomes prolonged. Unless the school is able to speak for itself as Yellowwood eventually did it remains the ‘alternative choice’ in the mind of the student:

At first, I was very affected because I had started failing because now my dream had not come true. I had wanted to go to St George’s. Before I came here when my Dad got a place I told him ‘no’. I had refused to come and then after he got me to know some people he told me the place in okay. I decided to try it out so I came here and I got used to it. In F1 second term, he asked me if I wanted to transfer and I told him that I was used to it and I liked it (Rhoda FIV, Yellowwood).

Kenya has a merit-based examination education system which makes admission into secondary schools very competitive. Missing a place in the school of choice on account of poor achievement can be deeply disappointing, as is the case with Irene and Jacqueline, both
bright students who felt that the system denied them educational opportunities in better schools:

My dream school was MaryHill [a national school], I wanted to go to MaryHill but my marks would not allow me. I like it here because there are lot of facilities and I have made a lot of friends and it has made me grow socially and mentally (Irene FIV, Yellowwood).

I had a bad impression of the school even before I got here. I did not even know bout the school. I was thinking I was being taken to a bush school someplace. When I came here, the place was big, the students were many, from different place and now I am trying to adapt to the situation. I am adapted already (Jacqueline FIII, Yellowwood).

The vision of self, or a girl’s perception of her academic ability and potential, is strongly intertwined with one’s dream school. For girls like Irene and Jacqueline who wanted to attend a national school the disappointment of being in Yellowwood is different from that of Rhoda. However, for all three the eventual acceptance and decision not to leave comes about because of the ethos and culture they find in Yellowwood which is also established by the quality of educational facilities found in the school. As Lucy and Cecilia indicate, what a school offers instils confidence in the school:

I was not very happy to be admitted in this school because I wanted to go to Kabare Girls but my mother wanted me to come here. She likes the school because most of her sisters have learnt in this school and they used to tell her that it is a good school with all the facilities and then, I used to be affected by the climate in Kirinyaga district so I decided to come here. I am happy here (Lucy FIII, Yellowwood).

As for me, I never expected to come to this school. I wanted to go to a national school but I eventually accepted when I was told that I would come here and after staying here for a whole term, I decided that it was okay. I went and told my mum that it was okay because nearly all the facilities are provided in the school (Cecilia FIII, Yellowwood).

On the other hand, there are girls who will not adapt and or settle in a school that is not of their choice. They remain detached from the school which results in disruptive consequences on their schooling:

I know of this girl in my class who spends her time of thinking how she can transfer from this school. She wanted to go to Moi Girls. She has refused to adjust and it affects her education (Dorcas FIII, Yellowwood).

In contrast to this, the high achievers in FIV reported that the failure to secure a place in a national school compels girls to work in competition with their counterparts in these schools:

Back in primary school I used to compete with some of those who went to Alliance, Mangu and Kenya High and when they went there I felt as if I was not supposed to be here [Yellowwood]. But when I came here I made it to my mind that I should work hard because when you go into university it will be that they take people from provincial class or national class. So we can fight for that position so I have to work hard (Charity FIV, Yellowwood).
The “fight” as Charity describes it is a case of clear ‘academic jealousy’; fuelled by the competitive nature of education in Kenya. A positive perception of oneself as an achiever sustains the competition and the adamant refusal to see oneself as academically inferior just because one failed to secure a place in one of the highly prestigious national schools.

This notwithstanding, there is a cost to ‘achievement’. It is important to note that Charity is aged 19 (see Appendix I), which is way above the mean average (16.6 years) of both forms. Charity has probably repeated primary school classes in order to improve her grades. Her aggressive reaction on the challenges of making it in a merit-based system is important to note, especially in the context of Kenyan education which is framed as offering equal opportunities for all.

Though it is arguable whether or not Kenya has enough secondary schools, it is not the case with the quality of secondary schools. Because of this, placement in secondary schools is highly competitive. Entry qualifications for provincial schools of the calibre of Yellowwood require high grades in KCPE and so Charity’s description of education as a ‘fight’ points to the nature of survival in examination-oriented systems. Examinations brand schools and set them in leagues (see section 8.2.4). Yellowwood is a brand name for educational achievement. At the time of the study, Yellowwood was among the top hundred schools nationally. It is a position that the school has maintained for a number of years but still, featuring in the national examination league tables is not enough for a girl like Charity, who appears aware of the fact that there are aggressive competitors who were better placed in terms of the competition as it moves to admission in university. It is for such reasons that she feels compelled to lodge herself in the competition. That way, she is assured of high education output, the kind that will gain her entry to her dream career in journalism.

5.4.2.1 Teachers and teaching perspectives within a branded school

From its physical profile Yellowwood can be judged as a school that is functional. However, it is the teachers and their perspectives on girls’ education that underpin how well the school functions.

Teachers’ professional satisfaction is integral to teaching more especially for the creation of an enabling learning environment. Though the teachers at Yellowwood perceive teaching as a rewarding profession, a few indicate that they would leave the profession given other career opportunities. While the teaching experience is rewarding, which could result in professional
satisfaction, differences are not uncommon among teachers because of employment conditions. Maintaining professionalism in spite of poor remuneration and conditions of employment is the paradox that teachers live with every day. The participants indicated that they derived personal satisfaction from teaching in the school but at the same time awaited other career opportunities – which many of them did not to seek seriously. The following describe how teachers perceive the school and what they derive their satisfaction from:

Initially I did not like it much but over time, I have come to like it because of the school. Girls work hard and are motivating. I do not like to think of the possibility of moving from Yellowwood as it would be difficult to cope (Ms K, Yellowwood).

Initially it was not my choice but it has become because of the expertise in teaching … I have helped students in their examinations … I would change for the sake of changing careers but not because of the disappointment of teaching (Mr G, Yellowwood)

Yellowwood contributes quite a lot to that satisfaction because in the time that I have been here in my own teaching subjects, we have made quite some progress. I have seen my students make good grades and there is nothing as satisfying as that (Mr N, Yellowwood).

Professional satisfaction more that anything else motivates these teachers and while they are fortunate to have highly motivated students, it is clear that they are themselves motivated by what they do. This explains why those girls who are disconcerted when they initially join the school, settle in fast.

For some teachers, satisfaction is attached to being in the leading ‘provincial school’. Teaching girls with the highest scores in KCPE grades in Murang’a district is found to be rewarding:

Yellowwood being a provincial school, we get good material and the girls perform well so one feels like the work is worthy. It is rewarding because you see that the girls are performing (Mr M, Yellowwood).

For others, teaching has always been the career of choice so it does not matter what kind of school one is in:

I chose teaching as my career and the reason is because I used to admire women teachers. I did not like the idea of going to a job at night so that made me choose teaching as a career. I thought of it at form three (Mrs M, Yellowwood).

The choice of career is personal, however, underlying the choices that Mrs M considered there are strong gendered overtones in that she indicates that her choice was limited to teaching and nursing. While it would be unfair to castigate her choice it useful to bear in mind that she is a resource as far as career guidance is concerned.
Both statistical and thematic findings conclude that professional satisfaction is high among teachers at Yellowwood. Such satisfaction breeds rewarding and enjoyable teaching experiences. The teachers therefore like the school and are positive about their students. This attitude explains why students describe them as supportive. It also points to the reasons why Yellowwood school is easily the school of choice for the majority of girls. It also explains why the small minority who initially reject the school quickly change their perceptions to eventually become part of it.

5.4.3 THE ‘GREEN MONO’: THE EXPERIENCES OF SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION

The “green mono”\(^{10}\) is a term used by students in Yellowwood to refer to the behaviour and antics of new girls in their first year in secondary school. Monos are naïve in their ways and thinking. As one girl puts it “green monos are innocent, you do not know anything”.

The impression and experience of a school has lasting impact future perceptions of schooling and education. Irrespective of whether the school is of ones choice or not, the outcomes of a four year secondary education can be linked to the initial impressions and experiences one has in F1, the foundational stage in secondary school. The experiences and impressions of subjects and teachers, the tales of woe and victory around school subjects and teachers are constantly relayed informally. They constitute a significant orientation to the school. Some of them become a basis for educational choices and decisions made in FIII and FIV. It is on this account of that exploring the experiences of the “green mono” is important. Below I highlight the issues I consider critical to educational choice making decisions.

5.4.3.1 Dissenting voices and the viewpoint of the ‘green mono’

The social experience of the “green mono” is part of the non-formal curriculum common in boarding schools. It is an extension of the school family culture to which all form ones quickly become inducted once they arrive in the school. The first point of contact with the reigning culture is with ‘mothers’.

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\(^{10}\) The word mono is derived from biology as in ‘monocotyledon’ and ‘dicotyledon’. Mono denotes a single status and is a cheeky way of letting Form Ones know how simple they are in terms of academic knowledge.
‘Mothers’ are student mentors assigned to orientate the new arrivals so that they settle quickly into the school and without much fuss. They are predominantly form twos. Their age allows them to effectively relate and nurture new girls into the school culture at Yellowwood. These mentors are like big sisters. They are described as “the friend you get to be connected with”. The impressions derived from connections with mentors is personal, which means that the impact decisions in both positive and negative ways.

Participants revealed that one is overwhelmed by the mere fact that one has joined a ‘big’ school. They reported that the first impressions are of “focused”, “very serious” girls going about their business with “no wasting of time”. The impression that Yellowwood is a no-nonsense academic institution is recounted below:

The first time I came here and we went for assembly and I saw very many teachers unlike our primary school where there were seven. I knew it was really hard work and we were meant to work hard, not only the teachers but also the students (Peninah FIV, Yellowwood).

Yellowwood adheres to a code of conduct that to which there is an accepted social decorum and academic standard. Conformity to this code is quickly brought to the awareness of all new arrivals:

My ‘mother’ told me about how you are supposed to carry yourself in the dorms and in the classes (Cecilia FIII, Yellowwood).

The first time I came to KGHS, that week we had a prize giving and then I saw some people were given some presents and I became attracted to that thing. Then I started working hard but to my amazement, the first time I did not make it I had a B+ but I keep on working hard but in second term I did not make it. Third term, I was having the same grade B+ but in F2 when I went home I told my parents and they encouraged me and when I came here as a F2 I made it in first term and I kept the spirit (Esther FIV, Yellowwood).

The hope that the school of choice will realise one’s dreams is soon contested by stiff academic competition and the nature of socialisation that prevails within the hidden curriculum. Extended probing revealed that a ‘serious academic culture’ is sometimes contested. The dissenting voices in everyday socialisation compel new girls to listen and often heed to the views and practices that negate their initial first impression of a school with a diligent work ethic. Within a few weeks the warm welcome and the positive and optimistic outlook may easily become a front for a covert or hidden curriculum. The quotation below shows academic study to be the core school activity. However, behaviour around examination time suggests that not all girls are keenly focused on academic work:
Me as from the time I was in form one, I realised that people were not serious during the term but when exams or continues assessment tests (CATS) neared, they started to get very serious and in fact they created tension during exam time (Lispah FIV, Yellowwood).

In Yellowwood study is judged by consistent hard work throughout the term, which the observation above seems not to suggest. While different perceptions towards schooling are not uncommon in boarding schools, the attitude emerging here is one of girls who are bored with education. While these are in the minority, they are the kind that perpetuate a somewhat apathetic attitude to education and the voice of dissent discussed earlier:

If I can be asked to finish my education right now, I can just finish and run away and go home very fast. In fact I am bored.

Whether or not such voices have a following or an impact only becomes evident in the decisions leading to educational choices particularly school subjects. Apart from hearing and learning from the experience of older girls, the new girl has to pave her own future by learning to make important personal choices with regard to perceptions and views on learning, schooling and education as a whole. It is here that the dissenting voices are most powerful in breeding confusion. In this particular case, attitudes towards subjects are so strongly conveyed that they create a fear of the subject:

Some of them kinda scare us because they were like ‘Physics oh God! Physics is so hard’ … the first thing when you see the physics teacher you are just like ‘It is so hard’. They put into us the mentality that some sciences are just difficult. It is not only the “mothers” it is the whole school as in some form fours and form threes. They put some negative mentality in your brain about some sciences and some humanities (Mary FIII, Yellowwood).

In form two I used hear people say that physics is hard especially in the upper forms … so as I continued I got a negative attitude to maths and physics and so when I choose the subjects for FIII I dropped physics but according to my performance I used to do better in physics than biology which is what I chose (Edith FIV, Yellowwood).

I was not understanding physics because it had a lot of maths although I was influenced by some people who were saying that it is difficult to take physics because it takes a lot of work (Susan FIV, Yellowwood).

The above quotations also point a hidden curriculum that is embedded with a gendered discourse that says mathematics and sciences are not subjects for girls. Although placement in Yellowwood is competitively secured this discourse appears to prevail upon girls’ perceptions of their abilities in a powerful way. Much as there is the attempt to challenge this discourse in classroom and in the school curriculum, it continues to be powerfully disseminated in the informal arenas like the home, the dormitories and outside class. In these arenas it is difficult to mitigate which is why it has consequences on the educational decisions taken in FIII and FIV. Below is a demonstration of how a bright girl, Yvonne (see profile in Appendix I) yields
to peer pressure despite her awareness of her own academic abilities and the encouragement of her ‘mother’ not to conform to the common practice:

My ‘mother’ was very encouraging. She told me that there were some people who would come and say physics is hard. ‘Physics is hard’ she kept telling me, ‘but I will be taking it in FIII’. Then I told her that I would work toward attaining that goal. At that time I think I scored high marks in physics and then when it came to FII, it turned out to be good and then it turned out to be hard and I dropped it (Yvonne FIV, Yellowwood).

Others like Rebecca demonstrate that an individual’s pragmatic assessment of their abilities can help in the making of sensible choices:

Choosing of my subjects was my choice. I was not influenced by anyone because I choose to be taking biology and I dropped physics because it was hard and generally I am very weak in maths … (Rebecca FIV, Yellowwood).

Earlier in this chapter I point out that there are ‘dying’ subjects in this school (see section 5.3.3.2). The ‘demise’ of a subject is linked to a value that has much to do with career prospects. The value awarded to a subject can determine whether or not it is popular or unpopular:

I remember these form twos who used to come and tell us that Home Science is very hard and then the teacher came around and asked for those that would like to take Home Science. I remember in a class of fifty, only about eight lifted their hands. So the teacher started convincing us that when you do Home Science you can become an Airhostess, now almost half the class lifted their hands (Sheila FIV, Yellowwood).

Perceptions towards school subjects are individual in as much as teachers try to make their particular subjects look favourable. In this particular case, the teacher’s insistence that Home Science can lead to a career in tours and travel did not increase enrolment in the subject in FI and FII. As Appendix N and Table 5.2 show, Home Science attracts few girls and enrolment is low even in FIII and FIV.

The subject Music also demonstrates another kind of conflict. As illustrated below, it requires one to be adamant over personal decisions when negative perceptions abound over one’s personal preference of a subject:

When I came here, the very thing I was told which I found to be negative was about music. ‘It is not good, it does not give you career chances’. But for me, I liked music very much and I did not want to drop it. So even now I am actually taking it and when I actually perform, it is my highest grade (Edith FIV, Yellowwood).
The above quotations demonstrate the challenges that girls face in making subject choices. Although consultation with parents is reported, the actual role of parents in times of crisis is not there. It demonstrates a detachment on the part of parents to the critical issues in their daughters’ education.

Evidently, subject choice decisions begin as early as F1, and while teachers claim to give some orientation to the new FI students at the beginning of the year, the foundation on which these decisions are made is weak because new students receive conflicting information. Part of the reason why form ones (FI) are neglected has to do with the examination oriented system used in Kenya:

You see the Kenya system is examination oriented and it is like the teachers feel that it is FIII where the preparation for the KCSE starts, more so FIV … we forget about the foundation. It is true we have neglected the foundation (Mr M, Yellowwood).

What I can say is that as time goes on, since we have realised that we do not prepare the candidates from F1, we will improve on this. This calls for cooperation of all the teachers in the department (Mrs M, Yellowwood).

According to the Dean of Studies, in 2001 an induction programme was introduced in response to this need. Though the FIII and FIV were not beneficiaries it was envisaged that it would reduce the confusion about subjects at FIII:

We tell them what this school has to offer in terms of subjects, the choice of them at different levels; when they come to FI and at FIII when they have to take subjects that they will take at KCSE. We let them know about the programmes of the school … the facilities … everyday programme … the assessment structure … (Mr N, Yellowwood).

Yet, even with the good intentions of this programme the dean is aware that follow up between FI and FIII is critical given the power of peer pressure and the hidden curriculum:

We are aware that that kind of influencing does go on especially by the continuing students in form two, three and four … not so much the form fours, it is mainly the form twos. (Mr N, Yellowwood).

The decisions that go into school subject choices are a core aspect of this study and will continue to be discussed even as other themes are brought into the chapter. This section, however, has served to illustrate what shapes subject choices. It is apparent that the perceptions developed in FI shape subject choice making processes, even when the academic environment is well reinforced by relevant and nurturing school programmes.
Second, the fact that school subject choices are contested by a hidden curriculum is reflective of the factors that underpin schooling. They undermine efforts to achieve academic excellence and incapacitate girls in their own educational decisions.

5.4.4 “DEMANDS, EXPECTATIONS, PRESSURE”

Form three (FIII) marks the commencement of the learning of subjects examinable in the KCSE. Because of this, attention is drawn to examination grades as academic achievement begins to be linked to subject in a serious way. This occurs towards the end of FII and two things happen can happen. One, girls become apathetic towards subjects they know they will eventually drop in FIII or they strive to improve their grades especially, for subject electives with few places. The former is normally the case with some science subjects. In both instances, there are demands and exceptions. There is also pressure to make decisions that have implications on higher education and careers. The pressure is great for those with inadequate guidance and support at home and school.

The subject selection process has implications on careers and even though it must be finalised by the beginning of FIII it is an added concern at the senior secondary level. In the section following, I review girls’ experiences of this choice making process. I examine the demands and expectations on academic achievement in particular the role examinations. In addition, I also examine the vision of self and in particular how girls view themselves with respect to their educational abilities and aspirations.

5.4.4.1 Academic excellence: The ultimate achievement

High academic performance is highly valued in Yellowwood both by teachers and the school principal but more importantly by the students themselves. The FGD participants identified hard work and devotion to one’s work as key ways to high academic achievement.

Top-achieving girls in FIII indicated that Yellowwood has an academic legacy to which one was expected to comply. As Marion put it “if someone managed to be admitted here in Yellowwood, she can perform well and get a higher grade than a C minus”. Confirming this the school principal said that that the school has an academic standard that it strives to keep and students are expected to keep it. The pressure to perform well is also reinforced by parents, who agree with her on maintaining high standards. In her report on discussions held with parents the principal underscored the following consensus:
From this year, one parent suggested that we improve our grades. You know our cut off point is ‘C’ grade. So if a F1 does not get a “C” you come with your parent. But they [parents] said “No”. These are form ones they have only learnt for one term so their grade should be “B”. It is a parent who came up with that and so we adapted it. We told the girls what the parents had said. I think it should challenge them (School Principal, Yellowwood).

Though parental expectations and attending a ‘good’ school underpins achievement, the real motivation comes from personal goals and personal drive:

Me I am working very hard in order not to be ashamed when my time comes. I feel a lot is expected from me to get a high grade (Lilly FIII, Yellowwood).

There are demands because once you have come to a school like this and your parents have said to you “You have gone to a good school”. It would be a real shame that you get out of school and you do not have a good grade and you were in a good school (Sylvia FIV, Yellowwood).

I feel that I am a great person in this nation being in a great school and in some years to come, some people will be relying on me e.g. being the first born in the family I have to help my younger sisters and brothers and also my parents in old age (Lenice FIII, Yellowwood).

The combination of a good school and high parental expectations exerts pressure on students to meet academic excellence but at the same time, it is a cause of stress and embarrassment. For some girls it is an unnecessary pressure that is psychologically damaging for them and costly on their parents:

I think that after the results and maybe the teacher notices that you have been getting below C plus for maybe two times, the teacher should call you and first learn the problem that you have before she calls your parents because it is also very expensive for your parents to keep on coming here with you every time. It is also bad for the teachers and the student to see that every time you are being brought to school by your parents (Sylvia FIV, Yellowwood).

In the view of one of the teachers, the demands placed on students are excessive. The pursuit of high academic scores relegates other equally important academic issues:

After the KCSE results are out we do not sit as teachers and the administration to try to discuss the outcome to try and find out in which subjects they performed well and the reasons. Why they failed or they passed and which girls performed well and the reason why. Maybe some girls have problems of fees and they did badly yet were bright (Mrs M science teacher, Yellowwood).

In addition to good behaviour, there is also the expectation that university education is the next level of education to be pursued by a Yellowwood girl:

As a Yellowwood girl you are expected to be principled and girls of integrity and personally I feel proud to be in Yellowwood uniform and I feel I should have a good reputation just like the school has a good reputation (Winnie FIII, Yellowwood).

In the village when people talk about this school, they expect the person to be a well-behaved person. As this is the last year in school, all people are eager waiting to see what we will get at the end of this year (Rebecca FIV, Yellowwood).

In my home area, the people that came from this school, most of them are in university studying (Frashia, FIV, Yellowwood).
It has been pointed out that Yellowwood is a top girls’ school in Murang’a district and closely linked to this is identity and education ability. If self-identity and ability determines academic achievement then girls’ perceptions of themselves in the light of this elevated status is of critical importance because in the Kenyan education system achievement is everything. The questions to ask are, ‘do girls see themselves as achievers?’ ‘What influences the perceptions they have of their abilities?’

5.4.4.2 Self-perception and educational abilities

Whether or not the girls in Yellowwood achieve high grades, their perception of self cannot be isolated from the families, communities and societies they associate themselves with. On the one hand, their perception of self is positive, and as Ruth points out, girls see themselves as flexible and adaptable to the challenges of education at Yellowwood:

Someone who is willing to learn can learn anywhere. In this school you can learn as well as you can learn in schools like Alliance [top national girls school]. In this school if you want to do well you can do well. If only you are devoted (Ruth FIII, Yellowwood).

If the self-perception among these girls is positive and confidence in their school solid, why then are girls held back in their academic achievement? Why do attitudes prevail towards science subjects like Physics? Why is the number of girls proceeding to university so small?

Gender inequality is familiar to the girls in Yellowwood and even though the girls may be protected from the more blatant forms of inequality such as teenage pregnancy there are other forms of inequality. The economic well-being of the family is one such example, which is known to determine how far girls can go with their education:

My mum could not be supported financially to go up to university level so she went up to college level (Jacqueline FIII, Yellowwood).

The lack of finances demonstrates how gender-based choices are used to determine education access. These subtle features about the gender phenomenon render gendering a complex concept. It is the same notion that claims that girls do not compare to boys academically because they do not work hard enough!

The way girls perceive and react to experiences that touch on their gender is both complex and contradictory. Yellowwood is a progressive school even though its rural context creates a fairly conservative aura about it. Though girls enrolled there enjoy the educational opportunities afforded to them and are confident about their abilities, there is a consciousness that as girls they are female and females have restrictions. The latter emanates from their
socialisation, the role and status society awards women vis-à-vis who they want to be and what they think they can be. In these quotations the conflict within them is evident:

Girls can think like boys …there are girls who perform better than boys. This trend has to change because girls usually have the mentality that they cannot do better than boys because of the society that we live in (Jacqueline FIII, Yellowwood).

Men are higher than women in their thoughts, what they do, family everything … I feel it in school because some girls compare themselves with Njiiris [a leading boys school] and they say they cannot perform because they expect Njiiris to win them because it is a boys school. This can be changed because we also have brains and we can work if we really want to work (Lenice FIII, Yellowwood).

Both Jacqueline and Lenice allude to a gendered hierarchy. They unwittingly express these gendered thoughts because they are socialised to accept that being subordinate is normal for women.

It is an additional irony that the above conflict within the self runs parallel to the conviction that girls educated in Yellowwood should become professionals. Becoming a housewife is a poor choice for a girl in Yellowwood.

… they believe that Yellowwood girls are well behaved and nobody should come out of the school and become a housewife because in Yellowwood there are good teachers, it is well equipped and everybody is expected to pass and become a good person in the country (Edith FIII, Yellowwood).

Housewifery is perceived as a wasted investment on a good education:

…when you come to a school like this, your parents use a lot of money for you to learn and you learn a lot of things. If you do not work hard it [housewifery] is your individual choice (Frashia FIV, Yellowwood).

The implication here is that girls in schools like Yellowwood are destined to become professionals whereas those others in ‘lesser’ schools are allowed to be housewives. The ‘housewife discourse’ is deeply entrenched in the belief that education can reverse gendered trends and that girls can become anything that they want to be:

You can’t make it being a girl you cannot make it to be an accountant. There are careers that girls believe are not for women like accountancy and law. Ladies cannot make it when it comes to doing a lot of research, doing a lot of reading (Carol and Mary FIV, Yellowwood).

The attainment of high educational outcomes is a challenge that girls in Yellowwood must face up to. Another challenge has to do with self-perception as regards educational aspirations. Contradictory messages emanate from the home front: parents and siblings confuse the girls about who they are, what their ability and potential is and subsequently what they can achieve. The following experience which demonstrates the perceptions of a father
with regard to his daughters and sons’ education is a reverberating example of the subtle ways in which girls’ efforts to achieve their educational dreams can be undermined:

You are the main investment. You know mum, I dreamt you will become a doctor’’. It keeps me going on, I have to become a psychiatrist and I know I am gong to become one. I know my Dad wants me to get somewhere and I know that he prays for me. (Caroline, FIII, Yellowwood)

To the son (Caroline’s brother) when he performed badly in school and got lower grades than Caroline in his end of term exams. “You work hard! ‘You are going to let me down and you are the man of the house!’”

Caroline (FIII) indicated that on the one hand her father encouraged her realise her dream career, law but on the other, the father persistently cautions the brother that the sister will defeat him in whatever he wants to be. The message that boys are better than girls is somewhat explicit within the mixed messages to son and daughter. Underlying these messages there is clear indication of the gender position of significant others like Caroline’s father. The fact that it goes on unchallenged is telling of how strong a gendered socialisation can be and how it is woven into education through the father, also the significant male figure.

A similar message is replayed in Isabella’s home where yet again a father expects a son to be academically superior to the daughter. The daughter appears not to understand the gendered innuendos:

My dad really encourages me. He sometimes tells my brother that if he plays around I will defeat him in whatever he wants to be (Isabella FIV, Yellowwood).

Further probes on the treatment of girls and boys in their homes revealed the following for Carol (FIV); “as for me, my Dad encourages both of us not one. In fact he tells us that we should compete with each other and I usually defeat him [the brother].” Asked about her father’s reaction, she said, “my father is very happy with me. When I defeat my brother and he tells my brother, ‘It is very shameful to be defeated by a girl!’” [Emphasis mine].

While it is true that fathers spur on sons by comparing them to other siblings especially sisters, social order among the Kikuyu community elevates males which is probably the reason why the fathers make the kinds of admonishments they do. Men are not supposed to be outdone by women and for the girls concerned, this is reality with a genuine social meaning to their lives because they understand the gendered social order. This is illustrated below:

As for me because in KCPE we got the same marks as my brother and now they [parents] are like “When you beat your brother in the KCSE I will give you this and this”. It is as if I cannot beat my brother. So what I tell them is that even girls can beat boys because we are created by God and whatever you believe in is what you get (Beatrice FIV, Yellowwood).
In yet another case, Mary reported that her elder brother in university had vowed to give a prize to any girl in the home who beat him at his accomplishment but went on to add that it was okay for a boy in the home to beat him. Mary told her brother that she would struggle and see to it that she defeated him. This gendered attitude is common in Mary’s family; she added that it was normal in her home area and its environs (in Kiria-ini village) for women to be perceived as “unable” or “less able” as compared to men.

Lenice also reported that in her home there is the set belief that girls can only attain so much in their education. In other words, their abilities are limited:

   My dad just believes that we girls cannot defeat my brother in math. *Yaani* [in other words] there is no girl who can defeat my brother in that home in sciences generally. My dad usually says, “sciences are for boys” now that is my brother. My father is an administrator with the government (Lenice FIII, Yellowwood).

Lenice finds that she has to defend herself when she is told such things and argues strongly that one day, she will beat her brother.

A similar observation by Dorcas shows the following about her father’s attitude:

   My father sees as if boys are cleverer. When we were in class eight, he used to show my brother some math but when I came to class eight he never even bothered with me a lot. When it came to going to secondary. He gave him first priority. That admission day he took him because we were to come on the same day. He took him first, then I came here late (Dorcas FIII, Yellowwood).

Dorcas added that she does not feel happy about this attitude especially because she was brought to school late and only after her brother had been taken to his school yet her KCPE results were better. Although she did not tell him, she reported that the father claimed it was the programme arranged for the day. She felt that her achievements went unrecognised and unappreciated. Dorcas still shows better academic performance than her brother but her father does not openly acknowledge this, as she would want him to.

Finally the ultimate case of gendered perceptions and a truly ironical mix:

   My sister cleared FIV last year and my brother Std 8 and he was admitted to Starehe Boys [top national boys school]. So when my sister’s results were out, my mum called the school and then she was told that she had a C plus when she actually had a B plus. So she came and exclaimed “Heee! I knew it! Only the Wanjui [the boy] will ever pass in this house.” Later she heard that my sister had a B plus and she was very sorry and said that she did not even think my sister would attain that kind of grade (Marion T. FIII, Yellowwood).
Gendered perceptions are both spoken and unspoken among parents and they have a lasting impact on their daughters. Girls withdraw, perform poorly or are forced into believing that they fail to succeed because they do not work hard enough. Others think that they are simply unable because they are female and react badly often feeling pressured to prove otherwise:

When I hear parents saying that boys can perform well, I tend to work hard so that they can see that it not only boys who are capable of performing well (Marion T. FIII, Yellowwood).

It affects me. Like last term I performed the lowest. My mum was like ‘Even you, you will not be staying here, you will be going for tuition. You will be going for tuition alone. The others [who include her brothers] can stay here’. I felt bad; even I could not talk to my mother (Sheila FIII, Yellowwood).

Despite the realities that girls face with regard to being female, they are aware that their educational dreams are attainable. However, for some the challenge of a gendered socialisation has extreme consequences on their perceptions of education, particularly with regard to how much education women should have.

Some girls do believe that if they get higher education than men they will not get married and others believe that as they continue with their learning like in university they will not get husbands because of their age (Edith FIV, Yellowwood).

While this is ironical for girls attending single-sex schools, it is a reality that is reinforced by what they have at home. Among the entire group of 48 girls there is one mother with a university level as compared to eight fathers. Coping with such thinking is difficult but there is a display of agency on the part of the girls. The example of those that strive serves as a source of encouragement, particularly when such experiences are from their own mothers:

My mother tells me that she was married by my Dad after finishing FIV. She would not want me to get married after FIV. She tells me even though she never managed to go to the university, I can do it and replace her (Lucy FIV, Yellowwood).

For my mother, they were very many in the family. My grandfather had two wives and he could not manage to educate all of them (Celica FIII, Yellowwood).

My mum did not manage to go to university because of school fees and she normally tells me to manage my time well so that I can go to university. She can provide me with the fees (Marion T. FIII, Yellowwood).

For others, the independent lifestyle of some of their female teachers is attributed to their being well educated and so has strong appeal:

In this school you find that most of the female teachers have pioneered and most of them are single. Like our maths teacher she was a student in this school, she is single and she has a very good life. So you are just like “if she can make it and she is single why can’t I make it?” Because she does not need somebody else to support her and she is a woman (emphasis mine). The fact that she is a woman does not mean that she needs a man in her life to control it. Why can’t you make it yourself so you have that foundation in yourself to make it in future (Margaret FIV, Yellowwood).

Lastly, their school is another source of strength and courage that girls draw from:
Being a student in Yellowwood, I believe that one has a strong foundation to know what is good for them. You get to know how to speak out as a girl what you feel about life. It is like men come first in most cases but when in a school like Yellowwood, you tend to get that morale and you are able to fight for your rights as a girl and you know what you need in future which will help you (Rebecca FIV, Yellowwood).

There is an effort on the part of the girls to challenge negative experiences and self-perceptions. All the same, the gender hierarchy into which they are socialised is an important feature of their lives that interferes and sometimes contests their perceptions of education and therefore their education aspirations.

5.4.4.3 Less is more: Dangerous decisions with school subjects

As pointed out by the descriptive statistics, subject preference patterns in Yellowwood vary. Explanations emanating from the FGD suggest various reasons including the neglect of junior forms, gendered notions and laziness.

According to teachers, the biased perceptions to subjects, particularly mathematics and science is rooted in F1 which is neglected. A group of science teachers observed that form ones had a weakly built grounding which resulted in poor subject choices later on:

I think you must have good foundations. So if the Form Ones are neglected and then in Form Two there is poor foundation then what you build on will not hold and therefore you will find that performances in sciences and mathematics will not be good (Mr M, Yellowwood).

I think that in some of the subjects in science very good grounding is done in F1 and FII because without some of the basics you would have a very frustrated individual in FIV. I think we have done a very good job in Chemistry (Mr N, Yellowwood).

Physics is a unique subject in Yellowwood both for the teacher and the student. The challenges begin early. Though students lack effort in the subject, the neglect of F1 and FII has been identified as contributory to the negative perception toward the subject and to teachers’ frustrations as pointed out below:

In physics there has been a problem of attitude because it is the one subject that students drop out of their own free will at the end of FII. Because they have that knowledge [that they can drop Physics], FII can be a very frustrating experience for a teacher of physics because these students minds are made up … I do not think I can fault the teachers on this (Mr N, Yellowwood).

As stated before choices that students make and attitudes they hold are their own, however, the role teacher ought to challenge biased attitudes. In Yellowwood the attitudes towards sciences and mathematics follow a trend that is not uncommon among girls. Though a negative socialisation the subject is rife the question of one’s ability as pointed out by one female teacher who was also a former student of the school is real, “I preferred humanities to sciences, I was assured of a good grade with them … I found that the humanities would uplift the weaker science grades”.

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Given that Yellowwood is an all girls’ school, one would think that teachers would be obliged to challenge biased attitude but this is not the case. For this particular female teacher the unbothered ‘this is the norm’ attitude explains why subject bias is perpetuated:

When I was in school, we tended to believe that sciences for boys and not girls. That is why you could see girls are on the weaker side … I think there is the tendency to believe that boys do better than girls (Ms M, Yellowwood).

Notions that “boys can perform better than girls in subjects like maths” endorse the negative influences responsible for situations like this: “I was influenced when I was in form one by friends I had. I got lazy about the subject, I never bothered about it. I came to form two, I started liking it but it was too late”.

Although one teacher was quick to point out that “this issue of ‘switching off sciences and mathematics’ does not happen in all girls' schools” in Yellowwood there is a consistency in attitudes as far as Physics is concerned, which indicates an established a trend. All the same, there is denial that the school has any responsibility for it. This is seen in the claims that such trends are “an element of tradition … the culture of the school”. On the part of the School Principal there is implicit acceptance that she actually believes in the observations that she tried to distance herself from, that is, that “boys can perform better than girls in subjects like maths”. These wrong, biased and negative attitudes simply limit girls in their subject options, making the subject selection process even more difficult.

As I have stated several times in this study, performance in KCSE determines future education prospects. The teachers at Yellowwood know this hence the following strategy. In 2002 (when fieldwork was conducted) the FIV were taking fewer subjects than other classes before them. This strategy was devised when they were in FIII with the intention of gaining more out of less. In what could only have been an attempt to overcome the lack of grounding in the junior classes, the entire form was convinced that with the minimum required seven subjects they would manage and pass KCSE. According to the Dean of Studies the logic behind the decision was to give students a reduced workload and increase the lesson time for the seven subjects “… where a student had three lessons in a subject it was possible to have five … they would be able to cover the syllabus in good time and therefore afford some time for revisions”. The decision was shaky. First, the risks far outweigh the envisaged benefits even though with the minimum number of subjects the syllabus would have been completed
early and rigorous revision undertaken. Second, with only the minimum number of subjects allowed under KCSE registration regulations, a candidate risks getting a low aggregate because all seven subjects count. With seven subjects a candidate also has limited choice in terms of cluster subjects for courses in institutions of higher learning.

As the school principal points out below, the decision points to the competitive nature of education in Kenya and the risks that students are willing to take, albeit in ignorance:

When we reduced the number of subjects we really did not know what that would mean at the end of it all and therefore to be on the safe side we advocated for eight. Now when I came here, already the then F3 (2001) had chosen seven subjects and so it was difficult for me to convince them to take eight and last year F4 (2001) who had taken eight at one moment wanted to drop one but we insisted and said “No”. If there were indeed any problems at Yellowwood, then the structuring of school subjects in 2001 demonstrates a real problem. So for me, this is a very risky class and that is why I do not want to play about with them. (School Principal, Yellowwood)

For some of the FIV students – in retrospect – the decision appears to have had repercussions that were far removed from their original idea that the eighth subject was going to be “time wasting”:

I feel insecure because the seven subjects I am taking are all examinable. Those who take more than seven when you fail one at least that will not be considered. When you fail one it is counted and that may make you fail in your mean grade (Veronica FIV, Yellowwood)

The risk of reduced career opportunities was very clear and worrying among these students:

For example, if one is doing English, Kiswahili, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry and Geography and Commerce your ambition is to become a doctor and you flop let us say Biology. That means you can’t be a doctor (Margaret FIV, Yellowwood).

It is difficult to understand why a school with a broad curriculum risked the future of its FIV students by allowing the minimum seven subjects. The only conclusion I can make is linked to examination results. As I have mentioned before Yellowwood has a legacy of good performance in KCSE which is seemingly an unstated factor motivating this risky choice. It would appear that the teachers want above all else high mean grades, which they believe are attainable with fewer subjects. The argument that more study time is secured is a valid and even a logical one, however it only serves the short term. In the long term, fewer subjects restrict one in access to higher education and career prospects. What is clearly ironical is that the same teachers describe their students as motivated so one has to wonder why studying eight subjects should be such a problem at all!
The case with the FIV class of 2002 is one of pressure to keep standards, whatever the means. It is a case of refusal to see girls’ education in the broader context of higher education and the career world. It is avoidance of reality and the rejection of access to competitive education opportunities. Sadly for these girls, the opportunities are readily available.

5.4.4.4 Higher education aspirations: The quest for university degrees

A university degree is prestigious. University is therefore the ultimate level of education one can secure. The majority of girls aspire to have it and the FGD reveal that girls believe that it provides the best opportunity for competitive well-paying jobs and more especially those that are male-dominated.

The desire for a university education is desperate. Girls narrated the drastic measures they would take in order to obtain the grades that would qualify them for university admission. Though the reasons for wanting this education varied, the prestige of being a university graduate was overriding:

- University education is really important because you have higher chances of getting a job or employing yourself. There is the opportunity to go abroad (Lenice FIII, Yellowwood).

- The level of education is higher … in the university you can get a degree and the person with a degree gets a job quickly than the one with a diploma (Margaret FIII, Yellowwood).

- I usually admire those people that come from university (Mary FIII, Yellowwood).

For these girls, there is a value to university education that is unobtainable elsewhere.

Other reasons were linked to parental influence. Parents believe in the supremacy of university education and many girls reported that they were repeatedly reminded that a university education provides higher chances of getting a job. This constant remainder develops in the girls a mentality that helps to keep them focused. As one girl put it, “as time goes by you realise what you want and that is what you go for.”

Until the mid-nineties university education in Kenya was the preserve of a few because admission was pegged to accommodation or bed capacity. Today, public universities have expanded their programmes even though admission still remains competitive. There is also an increase in private universities and as a consequence cumulative joblessness among university graduates. This, however, does not dispel the high regard for university education. The quest for university education in this school is unmatched so the question remains ‘what do girls
really want out of university education?’ As pointed out by the Dean of Studies it is the ‘degree mania’ that is responsible for the desperation:

... we have this other very large group, which will take subjects simply that will enable them to land in public university ... if it is CRE that will make them pass and will not necessarily lead to any career, they would rather go for that CRE so that they go to the next level of learning. Maybe with the hope that when they go there they have a degree of some kind and things will simply sort themselves out and it is this large group I fear for ... they want to do everything they can to go to public universities (Dean of Students, Yellowwood).

This observation indicates the high expectations placed on girls in Yellowwood. While the girls in this school are to be commended for their high educational aspirations, they are naïve about the job market because they link employment prospects almost entirely with university education:

When you think about going to university, you have this mentality that as compared to somebody going to college you are much better in terms of job employment. I stand a better chance of being employed when I am from the university (Lispah FIV, Yellowwood).

I can have more chance to learn about my career in colleges. Lakini [but], I want to go to university because if you compare a person with a diploma and one with a degree, the one with a degree has a higher chance of getting a job than the one with a diploma because the level of education in a university is higher than the one given in a college (Marion T. FIII, Yellowwood).

I think if you go to the university you have more privileges for going abroad and you can even get a job. Maybe you can work hard, do some research (Caroline FIII, Yellowwood).

There is also social standing and improved identity that comes with this level of education:

I desired to go to the university from when I was young because, I admired the hats they put on, the way they looked neat after graduation so I was like they look cute and look like people of high standards. I was in class two I remember, and it was during that time when they were graduating and I saw them on the television. They looked smart. Then I asked my mum what was happening then she explained to me why they were in that uniform and I told her that I would like to go to the university. I have always dreamt of it (Mary FIII, Yellowwood).

With the exception of parallel degree programmes or study abroad, discussions revealed that alternatives to university education were not considered ‘respectable’. Asked what they would do if they missed university admission, one girl said that she would apply to a university overseas. Others said that they would take a college education and work their way upwards to the career of their dreams as repeating a class takes up too much time. “I see as if I will have taken a lot of time in reading [common word used to refer to studying in school]”. Some however were bent on getting there whatever time it took. They indicated that they would repeat the class until they got the qualifying entry points. According to Margaret, “me I think I can rewind [repeat] to get the best grade to go to the university.” Very few girls felt settled with the fact that they could still become what they wanted to be in life even if they missed a university education.
The problems that riddle public university education in Kenya also came to the fore in the discussions. Sylvia expressed concern citing that strikes were detrimental to the quality of education and the reputation of public universities. She stated that it takes too long to complete an undergraduate degree in Kenya, as universities are unpredictable. For this reason, she preferred to study out of the country. She also expressed concern about becoming old in school, as she wanted to be married by the age of 28.

The discussions revealed that girls on the whole lack a clear understanding of the link between the school subjects they take in the four years of secondary education, the degree courses they intend to pursue at university and the careers to follow thereafter. While they are still young and perhaps unable to make clear-cut decisions on the latter two, the observations of one of the female teachers captures the reality of the situation where girls are schooled to think of degrees rather than careers:

… some girls after KCSE results are released come back to seek advice on career changes indicating that they are not sufficiently knowledgeable on what subjects pertain to what careers.

These perceptions undergird the quality of career guidance in Yellowwood. According to the same teacher, it is the school that is to blame. It is a repeated cycle that is in her opinion problematic:

… we fail because we do not discuss the results, the university intake, we do not even link the course that they are going to take with how they were performing and maybe look for strategies for improving.

The above sentiments are in reaction to some assumptions. Yellowwood is a single-sex girls’ school and there is the assumption that girls are motivated and fairly intelligent and therefore able to tackle their education with ease and even minimal guidance. While one would expect a high level of motivation among girls in a school as prestigious as Yellowwood, the neglect of career guidance warrants the questions. Do teachers in this school know where guidance is required as far as subject choices and careers are concerned? Judging from the continued underrepresentation of women taking science and technology degrees in universities and the influx of liberal arts degrees both in private and public universities, I would suggest that no is the answer to this question and hasten to add that little has changed with the 8-4-4 to challenge gendering within the school curriculum.
5.4.5 THE PARENTAL FIGURE IN GIRLS’ EDUCATION

Parents generally have an important role to play throughout the span of their daughters’ education, which at the secondary level is particularly important because of the decisions that have to be made. Literature lauds parental involvement in a child’s education. In the Kenyan context involvement depends on a variety of things. In schools like Yellowwood parenting tends to be handed over to the school. In fact the organisation of boarding schools in Kenya encourages it and parents easily relinquish the responsibility to the school.

According to the School Principal, once parents have paid school fees for their daughters and bought personal effects, “they leave the child in school and there is no follow up, not unless the child is in need of something and even then, they really want to confirm that really there is that problem.” In her experience the attitude of parents can be summarised as follows:

The child is with the teacher, that is the right person (School Principal, Yellowwood).

The focus groups discussions yielded findings that indicate an unresolved tension between teachers, parents and students. The power and authority of a school over education – which is embedded in the history and development of boarding school education in Kenya – literally relegates parents to the periphery yet the school is constantly insisting that parents take on a more visible role in their daughters’ education.

5.4.5.1 Parental presence: The spoken and unspoken tensions

The views of teachers and the principal indicate that the level of parental engagement and the seriousness with which they take on educational matters is wanting. Parents perceive sustained involvement in school matters as the business of the school. This lack of interest is not unique to some parents alone as the school principal herself does point out she has a similar problem with the education of her own children:

I wish the parents were interested in their children’s education. I think generally in Kenya we have not reached that level, because I doubt if even me I can be leaving this place just to go and find out how my daughter is performing. No, I think it is long time since I did that! So it is not until I am called for, that is the time you come in. When you go to the school principal you know what you will ask. Mainly, it is something to do with school fees because there is no other business anyway (School Principal, Yellowwood).

Considering that the school is an institution that has a high social status the academic success of Yellowwood tends to alienate parents because they fail to see their role given that the school is producing what it should be producing. For the teachers this is read as a lack of interest and it contributes to the positive and negative education experiences that girls have:
I think the level of education of the mothers in this school contributes a lot to the education of their daughters (Ms M, Yellowwood).

We have been inviting parents here because of their daughters’ performance. You find that the mothers have nothing to say about it (Mr. G, Yellowwood).

According to me the parents are not so supportive. You as a teacher you are struggling but most of the parents have not the understanding and are not very supportive (Ms K, Yellowwood)

While the frustration is evident from all three teachers, Ms K ascribes the problem to a lack of understanding. Understanding of the on-goings can be linked to the level of education that parents have, particularly mothers who are in this case the more regular visitors. Parents in Kenya have high regard and preference for single-sex boarding schools. They are seen to ‘solve’ many of the problems parents have with adolescent children such as keeping them under control. Parents with children in boarding schools can get away with parental responsibilities.

Mothers are cited as being involved in their daughters’ education. Well-educated women serve as strong role models and influence girls’ education choices. According to the teachers the level of education that mothers have makes a difference to the daughters’ education choices. Professional women take their daughters’ education seriously. The non-professionals and successful businesswomen tend to become absorbed in non-educational issues. From his observations of parents’ meetings, Mr G concludes that mothers with nothing to say to their daughters about education cannot “motivate the character [girls]” at home. In linking this with girls’ education aspirations it would mean that such mothers are those with a low level or no awareness of what their role is in the education of their daughters. In such cases “it is the teachers that try and talk to the girls. The parents may not be able to tell the girl to work hard or even understand the grades that they are getting.”

Teachers and parents in Yellowwood meet occasionally at academic clinics. The majority of mothers that come to these meetings are described as self-employed with primary and secondary education. They are said to use the forum to divert from academic issues to the strains and challenges they experience in paying school fees. Some of the teachers are also forced to use their mother tongue which they claim limited the content and the seriousness of academic discussion. According to them, it takes time for the parents to understand the significance of grades. Some of the teachers claimed that mothers with little education want their daughter to get average grades and are not necessarily interested in higher education especially not university education. According to Mr G, the Head of Guidance and
Counselling, “most parents are housewives; standard 8 and form four others are drop outs and they may not have a lot to tell their daughters.”

While the low level of education among mothers is true (see 5.3.2), the stance adopted by the Head of Guidance and Counselling demonstrates superiority by teachers over parents. He downplays the capacity of mothers to understand what goes on in a school like Yellowwood. Teachers are professionals who ought to assert themselves in a way that makes parents take a more active participation in their daughters’ education. The perceptions this senior teacher has of mothers reflect the biased societal attitudes towards women.

5.4.5.2 Mothers in girls’ education

Though the descriptive statistics show that the majority of parents take interest in the subject selection process, few parents sustain interest in their daughters education beyond what they have to do. It is only in a few cases that both parents attend academic clinics; otherwise it is mothers that attend these meetings. Clearly, the on-goings in a girls’ education are relegated to mothers while fathers attend to school fees matters. In addition, interest wanes over the years and by the fourth year, hardly any parents turn up for meetings:

I do not know if it is as the girl sometimes declines in performance the interest also declines so that by the time you are calling the F4 parents to meetings there are very few who come. It is not like when they are in FI. Then the parents are still interested in the school and maybe expecting much from the school but as they move on, it goes down. You find the number of parents coming to school lowers (School Principal, Yellowwood).

You see when they come here it is not that they have anything to contribute. Their work is just to come. ‘Mwalimu’ [teacher] has called us so we go. It is like they are easily available unlike the man who is busy. Most of the men I think are in Nairobi; it is the women who are this side (School Principal, Yellowwood).

The apathy and shirking of responsibilities is sometimes taken to extremes. Parents have sent grandmothers for appointments made specially for them. While such cases are few and far between they display an obvious lack of seriousness on the part of the parent:

Sometimes it is the grandparents who will come because this is a child, the parents are working in town, they wanted her to come to a school like this, so you find the grandmother coming. It is the availability. It is not so much to come and help you in academics. That one the teacher knows (School Principal, Yellowwood).

Seeing that mothers are the ones that take responsibility their daughters’ education, there are tensions within the girls with regard to the ability of their mothers to appreciate or even understand what goes on in their schooling. The School Principal reported cases of mothers
who feel unable to advise their daughters because the daughters are more educated. Girls whose mothers have a low-level of education have been manipulated and even deceived by their own daughters. Conversely, other girls’ set it upon themselves to achieve more than their mothers ever did:

> From what I know my mum did not make it to university education because by that time they did not have enough school fees. I feel sorry for her but I do not want to feel sorry for myself so I want to be determined so that I can at least uplift her spirits. At least console her and show her that from the hard work that she has done, I will have a university education and show her that her efforts are being paid back (Marion C. FIII, Kahuhia).

A different kind of tension between mothers and daughters emerges among the few mothers with university level education. They have very high expectations of their daughters. According to Ms M some of the mothers are oblivious to the fact that their daughters do not have the ability to perform to their own level of education

> She may be educated and so she believes that the daughter should also be as educated as her, not putting into consideration the different abilities. You maybe very well up upstairs but the daughter is below average, that is genetic. So they do not think of the genetic composition of children and their siblings. We have one, the mother is so discouraging she says “me I was in Yellowwood, I did very well and I performed well and I went to the university” but the daughter is not performing so the girl is now discouraged (Ms M, Kahuhia).

The issue of mothers’ education is sensitive, however the discussions revealed varying levels of awareness and reasons for the low level of education among females. Some said it is borne out of the way women are constructed:

> Personally, I do not believe that women have lower educational levels than men but it’s like there is a kind of a weakness in girls or rather a mentality that they cannot make it to the university but I do not really understand why it is like that (Nancy FIV, Yellowwood).

Other attributions were made to self-perception:

> For me, most of women they only like to complete F4 and then they have not decided to go to university but they have the potential to go to university. Maybe they do not understand their capability but they have that ability to make it.” Others to the community, “I feel that most of the girls in the community get that feeling that they cannot make it from where they come from (Alice, FIV Yellowwood).

Some girls said that male members of the family discourage female members from pursuing their dreams by instilling fear and doubt in their abilities, “how many girls have you seen becoming pilots?” This was question posed by a brother during deliberations on career options. According this particular girl discouragement comes easily with this kind of intimidation and one invariably opts for less prestigious careers, or careers that are not male
dominated. The girls on the whole appeared to agree, “most of the bad influence comes from men because men do not want to be defeated by women.”

Mothers feature as role models for several girls. Their attitude towards life and resilience in spite of the level of education elevates them. According to the teachers, many girls want more out of their education, “they do not wish to be farmers and so they are forced by circumstances to work hard. ‘I do not want to be like my mother, I do not want to be at home to just be a housewife’”. The fact that their mothers have not secured a high level of education and perhaps also an enviable lifestyle is a motivating factor to be different. For Helen, the sister is easily a role model because she is a medical doctor and her lifestyle is perceived as superior. For others, it is prominent public figures like Kenyan lawyer Paul Muite and radio news broadcaster Mambo Mbotela.

The influence of the media is evident in the choice of role models that a few of the girls have. However the choice of role models from Western soap operas warrants the question, aren’t there any female role models worthy emulating in Kenyan media?

5.5 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE CASE STUDY

The objective of this chapter was to find out the educational choices and aspirations among girls in Yellowwood Girls’ High School. The following conclusions are drawn with respect to the four research questions with respect to an all girls schooling experience:

The girls in this school enjoy the privileges of single-sex education beyond access and survival. The girls enjoy taking their education in this school where the school culture is friendly and nurturing. There is a genuine effort to create a cohesive community. The girls are positive and proud to be in Yellowwood. They have a high sense of self, are confident and believe that they can achieve well academically which is evident in their education output and outcomes. They speak positively about the challenges they face especially the competition outside school. However, even though their subject choices, university education and careers aspirations, girls’ choices are high the girls socialisation and the school environment hinders the full realisation of girls’ education potential and ideals. Yellowwood does not adequately challenge gendering within education. There is an overbearing culture and tradition that
penetrates the school institutional culture (see section 8.2.4) perpetuating pedagogy of
difference (see 2.2.1.3) rather than mitigating differences in girls education.
With respect to school subject choices and preferences the following are the conclusions:
Yellowwood is a top all girls school with excellent teaching and learning facilities and a
reputation of good performance (see section 5.3.5). However, single-sex schooling does not
prevent girls from being inhibited, even though their education choices may suggest
differently:

... I thought the girls were like that because it was a mixed school. Then I came to a purely girls school
... I did not see this aggressiveness in wanting to learn. I still saw inhibition. It is like there is still
something that is really not coming out about girls. Up to now I am yet to discover. Now these girls in
Yellowwood are far much better intellectually. You know they are better than other girls’ schools ... I
expected these ones to be quite open ... (School Principal, Yellowwood).

The inhibition emanates from their home background and their socialisation (see section 5.5.1.1
and 5.5.4.2). These experiences are carried into the schooling environment because education
policy reinforces a social order that is gendered. All the same, girls in Yellowwood expressed
satisfaction with their curriculum. However, for those who expressed interest in a wider
curriculum, the choice of the majority was foreign languages and not the technical subjects.

With respect to higher education aspirations the following are the conclusions:
For the girls in Yellowwood, university education is the ultimate goal. Some of the girls are
willing to make sacrifices for it; they will repeat FIV if need be, enrol in a diploma course and
eventually take a degree and for others, a private university will do if they cannot secure the
course they want in public universities.

With respect to career aspirations the following are the conclusions:
The choices the girls make are based on status and prestige rather than a match between ability,
interests and talents. There is an indication that the girls lack role models they can emulate, and
career choices appear few with the majority clustered around human medicine. The choices
indicate a lack career guidance and lack of parental involvement. Though mothers were cited as
role models, their education background and career types are typical female careers. This is a
reality that makes it difficult for girls to challenge the pedagogy of difference.
CHAPTER 6

A CASE STUDY OF FORT HALL GIRLS’ SCHOOL

I want these girls to do well. I want the girls to get the best from their education but it seems like the girls themselves do not know what they want in life. Even when we are talking and telling them to have self-motivation, they are not looking beyond the four-year education. They do not know what they want after four years so most of them have no direction.  
(School Principal, Fort Hall Girls Secondary School)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Like the previous chapter, this chapter examines girls’ experiences in single-sex schools, their preferences and choices with regard to school subjects, higher education and careers. It explores how girls’ view their education in the broad sense of the word.

6.2 A PROFILE OF FORT HALL GIRLS’ SECONDARY SCHOOL

6.2.1 THE INFRASTRUCTURE

Fort Hall Girls’ Secondary School is a town school. It overlooks Murang’a town, the district headquarters for Murang’a District.

The school was established as a single stream Harambee school in 1968. It is among the many such schools established in the late sixties and seventies by communities as a response to the growing demand for secondary education (see section 2.2.3). At the time of this study (2002), the Harambee status had changed because the government had taken over. As a district school, Fort Hall had three streams with a population of 515 students: 140 girls in FI, 138 in FII, 129 in FIII and 108 in FIV. Excluding the school principal, the school has twenty-eight teachers: eighteen female and ten male.

In terms of facilities, the school has more than just basics. The school campus is on about five acres of land. The buildings are relatively new and the school is noticeably clean and tidy. It has five boarding houses, a dining hall and kitchen. The dining hall doubles as the school hall and chapel and is equipped with a television, video and music system. At least 50% of the teaching staff is housed in 13 teachers’ houses on the school campus, this includes the school principal and her deputy and important support staff like the matron and cateress.
The learning facilities include two science laboratories, two home science rooms, and a library with about 1,000 books. Fort Hall pioneered computer studies in Murang’a district and has a well-equipped computer laboratory with 16 computers, a scanner, a printer and photocopier, and Internet connection in the School Principal’s office.

Large sporting facilities tend to be scarce in urban schools and this is indeed a limitation on the facilities in this school. All the same, the school has a single athletics field which serves for all sporting activities. The school owns a farm and though the condition is described as “bad” the dairy cows reared subsidise the milk consumed in the school-dining hall. It also owns a van and a modern 30-seater bus.

6.2.2 THE PEOPLE

The location of Fort Hall within a town makes the social dynamics slightly different from the other two rural schools. A key difference is the teaching staff. Town schools tend to have a staff that is predominantly female and married because women tend to follow their spouses wherever they get posted to. Female teacher turnover is high because the duration of stay in a school depends on the job posting of their spouse. While the turnover is bad for any school, a predominantly female staff is, according to the literature, good for an all girls’ school.

Women account for 84.6% of the staff in Fort Hall. Of the 26 teachers that completed the written questionnaire, six were male and fifteen female.

The school has a relatively mature teaching staff in terms of age and teaching experience. The majority of teachers (69.2%) are aged between 31 and 45 and many have taught in the school for years. The years of experience range from 1 to 18 but the cumulative teaching experience for the staff is 26 years, which is high. Over half the staff (57.6%) has between 10 and 29 teaching years experience the lowest is three.

In terms of teaching qualifications, 50% hold bachelor’s degrees, 46.1% diplomas and 3.8% other qualifications. Fort Hall teachers are keen on professional development, 23% of teachers in this school are taking other studies, primarily bachelor’s degrees (15.3%) for promotion purposes.
With regard to teachers’ perceptions of teaching, 80.7% chose teaching for a career but 19.2% did not. A disgruntled 46.1% indicate that they would leave teaching if they got better career opportunities while 30.7% were unsure. Nonetheless, a huge 92.3% derive career satisfaction from teaching in Fort Hall.

Like most secondary schools in Kenya, Fort Hall is affiliated to a religious body. In Fort Hall it is the Catholic Church. A school governing body oversees the management of the school. Of the fourteen members on the board only two are women, one of whom is the School Principal and secretary to the board. A woman chairs the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), a body that oversees the welfare of the school through the management of parents’ and teachers’ welfare, but all the teachers’ representatives are male. This gender imbalance reflects poorly on an all girls’ school!

6.3 HOME BACKGROUND

6.3.1 FAMILY PROFILES

The girls in FIII and FIV fall in the 15-19 age range. The median age is 17 years and the mean age 17.2. The family size ranges between one and thirteen children per family but for the majority the range is between three and six. 18.4% have three, 33.3% four, 17.5% five and 14.9% six children.

In terms of home background, over half (56.1%) the girls are from rural homes. 18.4% are from small towns, 8.8% from big towns and 16.7% the city. Among the three schools Fort Hall has the largest percentage (25.5%) of girls from an urban background (compare with section 5.3.1 and section 7.3.1).

The location of primary schools attended somewhat corresponds with the location of their homes: rural (54.4%), small town (31.8%), big town (10.5%) and city (11.4%). Similarly, the large majority (86%) received their primary education in public (government) schools while the minority (14%) received private school education.

Family background in particular parents’ marital status and the level of education, is significant to the context of the girls’ education. Parents and siblings through their
educational achievements serve as examples and play an unconscious role in girls’ education perceptions because of who they are and what they have achieved.

The mothers in Fort Hall are young. 71.0% are aged between 31 and 45 years compared with 6.6% of fathers in the same age bracket. Most mothers (79%) and fathers (88%) are married which would suggest that the large majority of girls are from ‘proper two parent’ homes. Single parents in this school account for 21.3% of the overall number of families but it is predominantly women in this category. Among them 10% are unmarried, 8% widowed, 1% divorced and 2% separated. Male parents who are single are specifically indicated as widowers (1.3%). Without wanting to read too much into this, it does appear that the single parenthood for women is to a certain extent a choice.

In similar trend to Yellowwood, there are mothers (10%) and fathers (2.6%) in the 31 - 35 age with teenage daughters. Given that one fifth (21.3%) of the mothers are single parents and teenage pregnancy is a common phenomenon in Kenyan education, it is a likely that they got their daughter as teenagers. This is also explains the high percentage of single-parents among mothers (compare with section 5.3.1 and 7.3.1). Whether being a young mother or a having a high level of education is more compliant with the education choices of their daughters’ remains to be seen.

Like I mentioned before, school fees varies with form and should decrease with each successive year. In Fort Hall school fees is Ksh 21,450 (US$ 268) in FI, FII Ksh 20,450 (US$ 255), FIII Ksh 23,800 (US$ 297) and FIV Ksh 22,100 (US$ 276).

In this school, the majority (52%) of parents spend Ksh 30, 000 (US$ 375) annually on their daughters’ secondary education. 18.4% spend Ksh 40,000 (US$500) and 16.3% Ksh 20,000 (US$250), a figure that is lower than government stipulations. School fee payment is a responsibility that lies with fathers (53.5%) in the majority of families. Others that take on this responsibility include the combined team of both parents (20.2%), mothers on their own (19.3%), siblings (2.7%), guardians (4.4%) and relatives (0.9%). The large number of children per family that are in secondary school and possibly also the economic status of family necessitates the involvement of siblings and guardians in school fee payment.
In Fort Hall, the number of children in secondary school is as follows: one child (36%), two (34%) and three children (20%). Large families can be burdensome and have implications on the choice of school (see section 6.4.1), girls emotional well being while at school and particularly on girls’ careers aspirations (see section 6.4.4) and also on parental decisions on girls’ career futures (see section 6.4.4.1).

6.3.2 EDUCATION AND CAREERS IN THE FAMILY

Whether or not there is the consciousness, the family is a structure that shapes important life decisions such as education choices. Outside of the schooling context, the family is the immediate context that reinforces or rejects values and perceptions and viewpoints. This is because it is made up of people who are significant and important role models for impressionable adolescent girls. Among the girls in this school, the large majority (95.6%) have role models within the family. Parents, siblings and relatives constitute 73.5% of these important figures and it is for this reason that great detail has been given to profile of key family.

In this school the level of education attainment is higher among both male parents and siblings. The percentage of siblings with a college education is higher among sisters (31.6%) than it is for brothers (25.7%), but for university education male participation is much higher (25.7%) compared with females (14.9%). In fact compared to Yellowwood and Dominican this school has the highest number of girls with siblings with university level education (see section 5.3.1.3 and 7.3.1). Again, like Yellowwood the higher percentage of females with college education can be attributed to the wide range of college education options open to women.

Among parents, this gendered pattern is even more pronounced. All fathers have some level of education. However for education at and below secondary level, mothers account for 56.2% compared with fathers 28.1%. The percentage of fathers educated to a college level (47.4%) is slightly higher than that of mothers (39.5%) but the percentage of fathers educated to university level (19.3%) is significantly higher than that of mothers (4.4%).

Interestingly, though mothers are younger, fewer have post-secondary education. This confirms that gender-related factors have greater impact on females than they do on males.
The impact seems to become more severe from one level of education to another. Considering that a fifth of these mothers were at one time teenage parents, there is the possibility that teenage pregnancy or even school drop-out might have hindered further education.

Each successive year of education is supposed to improve the level of professional qualifications and skills. In other words, the higher the level of education, the higher professional specialisation. This is not the case in Fort Hall.

Mothers of girls in Fort Hall are found in 13 different professions among which the following lead: teaching (31.6%), business (16.7%), nursing (7.9%), secretarial (5.3%), farming and tailoring (4.4%) and housewifery (3.5%). It is likely that teaching and nursing account for smaller the percentage employed in public (20.2%) and private (12.1%) sectors while business, farming and housewifery take up the self-employed (35.5%). The unaccounted 32.2% are the incomplete questions mentioned in chapter four (see section 4.5.1.6.2).

Of the 17 professions that fathers engage 31.6% of fathers are in teaching. It is the leading one. The others are mechanics and engineering (15.8%), business (6.1%), medicine (5.3%), finance and accounting (4.4%), administration and management (3.5%), farming (1.8%), and finance and accounting (2.7%). The majority of fathers work in public (33.3%) and private (13.3%) sectors, while others are self-employed (32.0%). A further 10.7% do not fall within any of the above three sectors.

There are also mothers (19.3%) and fathers (21.2%) whose employment is unaccounted for. This would suggest either that they have no profession or else as I have already indicated in Chapter 5 (see section 5.3.1.4) the girls found it difficult to articulate what their parents professionally. In this particular school, as is the case in Dominican (see section 7.3.2), it is possible that some interpreted 'profession' as a job for which formal training is undertaken.
Needless to say, the percentage of mothers with only a secondary education and below is high, which explains why there are few professionals in public and private employment and many in self-employment, which in Kenya is likely to be the *Jua Kali*\textsuperscript{11} sector.

With the exception of nursing (8.8%), teaching (6.1%), administration and management (5.3%) and accounting (4.4%), the percentage of sisters in other professions is negligible. For brothers there are comparatively fewer in teaching (4.4%), nursing (0.9%), administration and management (4.4%) and accounting (0.9%) but more in science and technology related professions like information technology (4.4%), engineering (8.8%) and even business (4.4%). Given that 53.4% of brothers and 46.5% of sisters have education that is of college level and above and participation in higher education among siblings is highest in this school, it is difficult to explain why the level of education does not correspond with quality professions especially in terms of numbers and specialisation. While this could also be attributed to inaccurate responses to the particular question, it is equally likely that the courses taken at college level are the common uncompetitive kind which leads to unemployment.

As mentioned in the previous chapter teaching is among the few professions found in rural areas (see section 5.3.2). The professional engagements among parents and siblings show similar patterns. This suggests three things. First, that there is strong parental influence on career choice. Second, that there are limited opportunities for other careers in rural areas. Third, widespread unemployment may be a cause for the lack of professional engagement.

### 6.4 A PROFILE ON EDUCATIONAL CHOICES AND ASPIRATIONS

Preferences, aspirations and educational choices are part and parcel of schooling whether or not one is in a school is their choice. While attitudes abound towards school subjects, there choices that have to be made in FIII. Other equally important decisions concern the level of education and career aspired to. Like the previous case study, descriptive statistics are used to profile patterns and trends in Fort Hall.

\textsuperscript{11} *Jua Kali* is an expression in Kiswahili. Its translation in English is ‘hot sun’. The term *Jua Kali* refers to an economic sector in Kenya that is related to science and technology education. The *Jua Kali* non-formal sector constitutes self-employed artisans, craftsmen and technicians who operate in the open, sometimes under the hot sun. The *Jua Kali* establishments are found in major towns of the country and constitute open-air enterprises or workshops where artisans and craftsmen, fabricate, manufacture, repair and sell various items some of which are of high quality goods (Barasa and Kaabwe 2001:352).
6.4.1 FORT HALL: THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

The quality of education opportunities in an all girls’ school is assumed to be high. The opportunities are equally accessible to all students enrolled in the school. However, this is perceived differently depending on whether the school is of ones choice or not. The data show that 54.4% of the girls consider Fort Hall their school of choice but 45.6% does not. Like Yellowwood and Dominican the latter group is made up of girls that are in Fort Hall on the advice of parents, relatives and former primary school teachers (compare section 5.3.2.1 and section 7.3.3.1). In this school, however, a number of girls indicated that they joined the school because they failed to secure places in the schools of their choice. Fort Hall is therefore a forced choice for over a third of the girls. They have to contend with receiving their secondary education in what is undoubtedly the ‘alternative school’.

In contrast to the girls, the majority (76.3%) of parents consider Fort Hall a suitable school for their daughters. Another majority (76.3%) indicate that the school offers better opportunities than they had in secondary school, a perception that can be deduced from the type of secondary schools they attended. Data show that no mother (0%) attended a national school as compared to the small percentage of fathers (5.4%). Only 20.4% of mothers attended provincial schools while the majority were in district (30.6%) and Harambee (22.4%) schools. The schooling experiences of mothers somewhat influence the choices of their daughters. If mothers attended national or provincial schools a similar choice is likely to be desired. For mothers who did not attend school at all, there is still preference for a ‘good school’. Among parents, over a third of mothers (39.1%) and nearly half of the fathers (47.3%) received single-sex schooling, which explains why Fort Hall is the school of choice for them (see section 6.3.2).

6.4.1.1 Experiencing education in the alternative school

The perceptions and attitudes that girls build throughout their education are in many ways tied to their experiences of academic and non-academic activities. Participation in and enjoyment of these activities is meant to enhance the overall experience of education. However, where this occurs within a school that is not of one’s choice educational opportunities are perceived differently, especially if there is a struggle to accept the school. The experiences are taken differently and may build different schooling perceptions leading to equally different kinds of education choices.
The girl’s experiences of academic activities vary: 36.8% indicated that they found their academic studies very enjoyable, 37.7% quite enjoyable and 15.8% enjoyable. The larger majority is on the lower side of the scale. Almost 10% said they found academic activities quite boring (7.9%) or very boring (1.8%), which is a negative perception of the most important objective of schooling. This negative perception towards academic work is further supported by the little enjoyment derived from private study or prep: close to a fifth rate prep a very enjoyable activity (17.7%), nearly a third quite enjoyable (32.7%) and a fifth enjoyable (27.4%). A smaller number find it quite boring (14.2%) or even very boring (8.0%). The ‘just bearable’ attitude to preps corresponds with varying levels of enjoyment derived from academic studies. These patterns indicate a lack of enthusiasm, which can be attributed to among other things the fact that the school is not of choice for nearly half (45.6%) of the girls. This finding is conclusive when comparisons are made to Yellowwood where the school is of choice for the majority (72.3%) and the enthusiasm for academic study high (see section 5.3.2.2).

For non-academic activities attitudes vary but the majority find pleasure in sporting activities. At least 30.6% indicated that they found games and sports activities very enjoyable, 20.7% and 29.7% quite enjoyable and enjoyable respectively. The percentage that find sporting boring or very boring is less than 20%.

The interest in and enjoyment derived from club activities is high. At least 43.4% describe clubs as very enjoyable, 27.4% quite enjoyable and 20.4% enjoyable. Sporting activities appear to compensate for the lack of enjoyment in academic activities. A similar attitude is also reflected in club activities, in particular Science Congress, an annual event on the secondary schools calendar which is academic in orientation and designed to promote science and technology innovation. For this, 60.2% indicated that is very enjoyable 23.9% quite enjoyable, and 15.0% enjoyable. For a school with varying perceptions to academic studies these percentages are very high, and reflect a positive experience that is unexpected especially because of the negative perceptions to science subjects already discussed (see section 6.4.3).

The high level of enjoyment derived from club activities is likely to come from the fact that there is a free choice. Sporting and club activities are encouraged rather then forced and in cases where girls manage the activities themselves the attraction is likely to be greater. The outcome of this is the positive enjoyment derived from music and drama by 67%. The fact
that these activities are promoted within the structures of the national drama and music festivals adds to the positive attitude.

6.4.1.2 Key players inside the school of choice
In the previous chapter the boarding school is described as like a family-like institution (see section 5.3.2.3). In this section, its relation to girls’ education is discussed.

Almost half (49.6%) of the girls indicated that the School Principal was very supportive, 25.7% quite supportive and 15% supportive. In this school 7.1% reported that they found her hardly supportive and 2.7% not supportive. Unlike Yellowwood and Dominican there is a range of varying perceptions even though the majority do not appear to find her overwhelming supportive (see section 5.3.2.3 to compare with Yellowwood). This is a disturbing finding for a boarding school, but it can be linked to resistance from the fact that the school is not the choice for a significant percentage of the girls. The other plausible explanation comes from the fact that the principal was new. At the time of the study, she was only a year old in the school and girls were adjusting to her personhood and leadership style.

There is a clear division in the way that teacher support is perceived in this school. Nearly a third (30.7%) of the girls indicated that they found class teachers very supportive, 18.4% quite supportive and 21.9% plain supportive. Close to a third also indicate that they are hardly supportive (9.6%) and not supportive (19.3%). However, as far as the support of male and female teachers is concerned there are differences even though males (25.0%) and females (26.5%) are rated similarly for very supportive teachers. Female teachers are on the whole perceived as less supportive. Between hardly supportive and not supportive the percentage is higher for females (25.6%) than it is for males (17.9%). This evidence contradicts the literature that claims that female staff create supportive learning environments in all girls schools (see Chapter 3 section 3.5.2). Ironically, Fort Hall has a predominantly female staff.

Secondary school education builds leadership alongside character and personality. Students therefore have roles and responsibilities in school, some of which are powerful. Classmates, prefects and schoolmates are all students but within the student community they take on different roles and wield varying degrees of power. Their support in the overall schooling experience is critical because peers create a nurturing and learning-conducive environment
and even become role models to each other. The perceived level of support from these three groups is important because Fort Hall is for some girls an ‘alternative school’ and so far the evidence shows that single-sex schools do not always have homogenous groupings.

Besides the fact that authority and power separates, social interaction also tends to distance students. By percentage classmates are perceived as very supportive (42.5%) compared with schoolmates (21.2%) and prefects (8.0%). A student’s position of power somewhat corresponds with the perception of support. Classmates contribute to everyday experiences through shared classes and lessons, which is perhaps the reason why the perception of support given is higher for classmates (86.8%) than it is for schoolmates (77%). Prefects, on the other hand, have a dual role as authority figures and as ordinary students and for them there is potential for conflict. This could be the reason why the majority in this particular school perceives prefects as hardly supportive (11.5%) and not supportive (50.4%). Indeed this situation raises questions about the nature of student roles within the school community and the likely impact on schooling experiences. This consideration is made with the highly rated Yellowwood prefects in mind (see Chapter 5 section 5.3.2.3) and the tolerated ones in Dominican (see Chapter 7 section 7.3.3.1.2).

Lastly, Fort Hall has the physical facilities (see section 6.2.1) to provide an ideal learning environment but the school community lacks a supportive base. Although 54.4% chose to be in this school and the majority enjoys school activities, Fort Hall is not the school of choice for nearly half (45.6%). In addition, the majority of students do not perceive the School Principal and prefects, both key authority figures, as supportive. Both undermine cohesiveness and subsequently perceptions and attitudes to schooling as a whole.

### 6.4.2 EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Of the 114 girls that responded to the question “what are your education aspirations?” the majority aspire to pursue university level education (78.1%), while a fifth (21.9%) only want college level education. None wish to stop their education at the secondary level (0%). These statistics are also supported by findings from the open questions, all of which indicate that university education is perceived as the ultimate educational achievement.
The extent to which these aspirations are realistic vis-à-vis the perspectives of teachers on the matter are divided. Though the teachers are unanimous that the girls have the ability and potential to attain university level education, they claim that the students are average achievers, “… these girls are admitted [to F1] with average marks”. It would appear that it is the lack of good study habits rather than average ability that is the reason for unfruitful learning. This is supported by their observations that girls do not work hard enough, and are lazy and lacking in motivation.

Parents appear to agree with the teachers’ observations. Their rating of their daughters’ performance indicates this. Few parents perceived the performance as excellent (8.3%), or even good (28.1%): the majority rates it as average (62.5%). On the whole the majority of parents (67.4%) are not satisfied with their daughters’ performance.

The culmination of the interplay between ability, potential and motivation is seen in the level of education that the girls in this school aspire for attain. In the last ten years only 1.7% of the girls in this school have proceeded to university. Yet between 1990/1991 and 2000/2001 academic years at least 1,000 girls have sat for KCSE (Appendix T). It appears that there is a conflict between what the girls desire and what they attain. The school is examined for this.

A school environment is contested ground and the findings so far seem to suggest that academic achievement is a consequence of multiple factors. Some of these are motivated by factors outside school while others by factors within school. These are not necessarily directly related to learning (see section 6.5).

6.4.3 SUBJECT CHOICES AND PREFERENCES

Fort Hall Girls’ Secondary School has four classes and eight streams. Because of the number of streams it is able to offer a curriculum that caters for the different abilities and talents of its students.
Table 6.1 is based on the school curriculum and it shows subject enrolment in FIII and FIV. In this school 12 subjects are compulsory in FI and FII. Home Science is an elective subject. 4 subjects are compulsory in FIII and FIV and 11 are electives. At the time of the study English, Kiswahili, Mathematics and Biology were the 4 compulsory subjects in FIII and FIV. As mentioned in the previous case study, subject choices at this level are permanent, and parental involvement is therefore critical. Of the 97 parents that responded, 89.7% indicated that their daughters consulted them for decisions pertaining to subject electives. However, 8.2% were not consulted while 2.1% could not remember.

All teachers (100%) and the majority of parents (83.3%) indicate that the school offers a good variety of subjects on its curriculum. However these perceptions are reflected very differently in the girls’ perceptions of the same subjects even though they too indicated that the school offers a good variety of subjects.

Table 6.3 below shows student’s percentage ratings on “favourite”, “worst” and “important” subjects. While it is based on the subjects currently being studied in FIII and FIV, it is difficult to know if subjects that have already been dropped, are included because the study was undertaken in Term 1, 2002 when these decisions were being finalised among students in FIII. All the same, the students all have a perception of subjects they take. In this regard, Commerce (14.9%), Biology (14.0%) and English (13.0%) lead in the ‘favourite’ category. The interest shown in Commerce is attributed to the relevance to the job market.
A few girls (7.0%) do not have subjects they would describe as their worst, but Mathematics (27.2%) tops the list followed by Physics (15.8%) and Chemistry (14.9%). For worst subjects the others show comparatively small percentages. In all three schools Physics is not a favoured subject while Biology is the favoured science subject (see Tables 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2).

In the observations of the science teachers the attitude is to blame. According to one teacher the girls “are not serious with the sciences”, “they believe the subjects are difficult” and “regard science as difficult and meant for boys”. In-depth examination however hints at ability and environment: the evidence for this is found in the subjects that girls regard as important.

Although 13.3% of the girls have no particular subject that they perceive as particularly important, perhaps because of a lack of attachment or even disinterest in the subjects, Biology (17.7%), English (16.8%), and Mathematics (9.7%) lead in order of importance. The fact that Mathematics is perceived both in the worst and the most important categories points to the conflict between attitude, ability and perhaps also the pressure to meet the basic requirements demanded of higher education and the competitive job market. On the other hand, the position that Biology takes in the favourite subject category corresponds to the preferences the girls have for medical related careers (see section 6.4.4).

In terms of subject value, all the girls have a favourite subject. But 13.3% do not place any importance on any subject, which suggests that there is a small percentage without subject bias, similarly 7.9% do not have a “worst” subject. This is also an indication that the girls have not formed or lasting impression of their school subjects. While these represent the minority, the majority has formed perceptions about school subjects.
### TABLE 6.2: FORT HALL: SUBJECT PREFERENCE PATTERNS IN FIII & FIV IN PERCENTAGE (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject preference</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Kiswahili</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Biology</th>
<th>Physics</th>
<th>Chemistry</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>CRE</th>
<th>SEE</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Home Science</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Typing &amp; Office Practice</th>
<th>Computer Studies</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favourite (114 responses)</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst (114 responses)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important (113 responses)</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The recurrence of negative perceptions towards science subjects and mathematics in all three schools may vary by degree, but it is disconcerting because girls’ schools are supposed to be above this kind of attitudinal problem (see Chapter 3 section 3.5.2). Out of 237 students in FIII and FIV only 43 (18.1%) take physics, less than a fifth of the two classes. However, Physics has a higher percentage rating as a favourite subject (7.9%) than Chemistry (4.4%) or even Social Education and Ethics (2.6%). This shows mixed perceptions but a changing landscape as far as girls’ education is concerned. One could postulate that there is an inclination towards a science-based career among some of the girls in the school. The changing landscape is also evidence of the positive experiences with science congress, which is rated by a high percentage as very enjoyable (60.2%), quite enjoyable (23.9%) and enjoyable (15%). The enjoyment derived from this is particularly significant in the context of reserved support and academic laxity in the school (see section 6.5.3.1).

From Table 6.2 it is clear that subjects in the humanities are highly favoured as compared to sciences and mathematics. While this pattern fits well into subject stereotypes further scrutiny suggests that preference patterns have changed. Though the literature suggests that CRE, History and Commerce appeal to girls (see Chapter 3 section 3.5.2), enrolment in these subjects is low for CRE and History in this school (see Table 6.2). Enrolment is especially important in these three subjects because they are known to enhance examination performance by raising the overall mean grade (see Appendix R). Also notable is dwindling enrolment among applied technical subjects like Home Science and Typing and Office Practice and Agriculture. Though space and teacher availability restrict the number of students for these particular subjects, Fort Hall has sufficient resources to serve a larger number of students than is currently the case.

Judging from the above trend, it seems logical to postulate that the value perceived of a school subject determines who enrols for it. CRE is not considered to be an important subject at all (0%) and nor are Home Science (0.9%) and Agriculture (0.9%). Typing and Office Practice (0%) and Computer Studies (0%) are not rated in the worst subject category probably because they are specialised technical subjects and the few that enrol for them have keen interest. In the case of the latter, Fort Hall is a pioneer as far as computer studies in the district is concerned. The subject was introduced into the school curriculum in 1997 and examined for the first time in KCSE in 2000. The 23 students who took the examination scored a C+ mean
grade, which may be the reason why the subject is held in high regard (compare with Dominican section 7.3.3.3). Still, how does this argument fit in with Social Education and Ethics, a pure humanities subject that is rated worse than Biology, a science subject? While it is correct to argue that subject patterns remain largely biased towards the humanities there is within each subject an incongruity that points to changing perceptions. The languages show this interesting paradox in more detail.

English is both highly rated as a favourite (13.2%) and important (16.8%) subject while Kiswahili – the widely used language of social interaction from what I observed in Fort Hall and the national language in Kenya – is hardly considered a favourite (1.8%) or even important subject (0%). It is the worst subject for 1.8%, which suggests that may, because of its wide use, be taken for granted even though it is an academic subject. For English, the percentage ratings suggest that an impact is made by the role the language plays in Kenyan education. The fact that English is the medium of instruction across the curriculum stands out in its rating as important. Kiswahili is in this sense ‘unimportant’ because it is only a local language.

Teachers’ responses on the attitude and outlook of girls towards their own education suggests that they battle with issues of self-esteem but make no effort to try and overcome the obstacles there are. One teacher argues that girls “lack of commitment to succeed, can’t sustain the urge to work hard continuously.”

For this well-resourced school and a School Principal with a keen interest in science education (see section 6.5.2) the perception that girls have towards science subjects and mathematics is unquestionably negative. The above trends reflect own attitudes and preferences but individuals do not exist in isolation. Thus, these are also pointers to the attitudes and perceptions that are borne out of particular kinds of socialisation. But there are also changing trends within these paradoxes. These are examined in-depth as emerging themes in the next section.

### 6.4.4 CAREER ASPIRATIONS: CHOICES, REASONS, PERCEPTIONS

The data show that the career aspirations of the girls are ambitious and match with their aspirations to pursue university education. How realistic these choices are and what single-sex education does to contribute to these aspirations is dealt with.
Out of the 39 careers cited by the three schools, the girls in Fort Hall desire 27. The medical field is their first preference: leading is medicine (25.4%) followed by nursing (6.1%), pharmacy (3.5%), and psychiatry, psychology and veterinary medicine each with 1.8%. Although the girls in this school have a high regard for biology and examination results show high scores in the subject, there is no link made to the study of the subject as a motivating factor for the choice. Money and prestige are the motivation, “they have a high salary … earns a lot of money … it is valuable, I can’t miss work”. On the other hand, humanitarian reasons prevail for those who perceive themselves as having a value social responsibility:

  Save lives of Kenyan especially dying of AIDS.
  Improve people’s health and search for incurable diseases [sic].
  I would like to assist the sick in my society.
  My choice of career to be a nurse was influenced by the fact that in our home, the hospital is too far … so I would like to go back and help people in this rural area.

For some it is role models within the family that have shaped these aspirations:

  … from the trait of my sister it is a good career.
  Follow footsteps of my mother because she is determined to help others unlike those who work for the sake of working to get money.

For others childhood dreams:

  Always wished to be a doctor since I was young.
  My role model is a doctor.

The fact that the country has few doctors is another reason that appears to outweigh the reality of the competition for these limited opportunities, but there is a lack of awareness of the job market particularly as concerns medical careers:

  Because doctors are few in the county and government is looking for more doctors.
  … has high demand, if I fail to get employed here I can go to other countries. It is marketable.

In one case, entrepreneurial reasons indicate a realistic approach to careers:

  I can be able to manage my own chemist and still work for the government.

The love of animals and the desire to get work in a rural area are other reasons cited for veterinary medicine:

  My love for animals.
  I can get a job easily since I come from rural.

Other preferences outside the medical field are accounting (13.2%), law (12.3%), information technology (6.2%), engineering (6.1%), journalism (3.5%), business management (3.5%)
airhostess (2.6%), tours and travel (1.8%) and secretarial (1.8%). Not a single girl in this school aspires to pursue a teaching career.

Of the 15 girls who want to pursue accounting (13.2%) only one links her choice to good performance in mathematics, the rest are motivated by prestige and remuneration, again a false based perception for a career that is based on applied mathematics:

- I am good in mathematics, English, science and commerce.
- Earn a lot of money and stay a good life.
- It has a good salary.
- There is a lot of prestige.

Interestingly, 10.2% of the girls would like accounting introduced in the school but missing in this particular case is a realistic link between subject performance and career, which is somewhat incongruous for this challenging career.

The case is different for law (12.3%) and many reasons for the choice are based on childhood dreams and personal preferences:

- It has always been my dream and my father’s dream.
- It was my aim from childhood.
- It is the one I have planned for many years.

For others it is the influence of those perceived to be role models:

- Because of my role model Joyce Aluoch.

There is also the perceived guarantee of financial stability with law and at the same time a means to realising important humanitarian goals such as fighting for justice and truth:

- I like truth and justice … fighting for other people’s rights.
- Fight for human rights.

Languages are critical subjects in people-oriented careers and perhaps good performance and positive perceptions of both English and Kiswahili contribute to those wanting to become journalists. One girl indicated that she wanted to venture into innovative broadcasting “to have a programme on fighting for children’s rights”. Yet for others pragmatics reigned. “It does not take long in training” was the motivation behind a secretarial career and travelling to other countries for careers in tours and travel, airhostess and acting.

There is an indication of shifting perceptions for science and technology careers even though the KCSE examination results over five years show performance in related subjects to be poor. The fact that the girls have the potential to pursue university education is evident in
their choices of careers even though they may be idealistic (see section 6.4.3). Both physics and mathematics are critical subjects in science and technology based careers. The large majority do not take physics and a significant percentage hate mathematics. All the same, for some information technology is a “dream career” while for others role models influence the choice:

I want to follow my sister’s footsteps.
My brothers and sisters helped me to choose my career.

In one case, the choice is based on subject performance: here career aspirations are perceived as coming alive through the subject:

I do well in physics … I enjoy physics and the pay is wonderful.

The naivety of the relationship between school subjects, academic performance and career choices is evident in the ambitious choices in the medical field. However, these aspirations point to the impact subject perceptions have on career choices.

In particular, the patterns above point to the quality of career guidance in Fort Hall. In this school career guidance falls under the Guidance and Counselling department, and is managed by an experienced female teacher. Running this department is an additional duty above her normal teaching load and so for effective guidance to take place, the involvement of other teachers is critical.

In this school, over two-thirds of the teaching staff are involved in guidance and counselling activities but to varying degrees. Few are highly involved (7.6%) about a third each is quite involved (30.7%) and involved (38.4%). The rest of the staff merely tag along, and they range from hardly involved (19.3%) to hardly involved at all (3.8%). The level to which teachers engage in this programme and related activities is critical as seen from the students of percentage rating of how they enjoy it. Only a third (35.7%) of the students find guidance and counselling very enjoyable. For others it is quite enjoyable (18.8%), enjoyable (25.0%), quite boring (10.7%) and very boring (9.8%). The input of teachers somewhat corresponds with the degree of student enjoyment. If more students enjoy it, the more likely they are to become involved in the activities and to gain.

Interestingly, the teachers themselves have a low perception of the effectiveness of the programme. Half (50%) of the staff perceive guidance and counselling as plainly effective.
and collectively less than a third perceive it as very effective (11.5%) or even quite effective (15.3%). For the rest guidance and counselling is hardly effective (7.6%) and for some ineffective (15.3%).

In absence of enlightening career guidance programme career choice is left to crisis management. In this case, the perceptions of the teachers and the experiences of the students show why there is something of a conflict between what students aspire to (the ideal) and what they are able to secure (the reality). This conflict emanates from the quality of career guidance in this school. While the role of career guidance is critical to the high education aspirations the perceptions toward subjects and academic achievement is not taken into account. That means that the reigning school culture rules. This includes all the social influences that intersect on girls’ education.

At another level, the career patterns in this school indicate that there is little significant or even relevant guidance given to girls. The document used as the blueprint for career guidance links school subjects to university degree programmes, it takes no account of talents and interests. While the document is beneficial in providing insights into the job market it assumes that all students aspire for university education. The reality is that there are girls in this school who have no aspirations to pursue a university education. 21.9% want only a college level education. While Fort Hall is not acclaimed for its education achievements particularly university admission (see Appendix T), structuring career guidance on cluster subjects for degree courses narrows girls’ career possibilities and it is both unrealistic and misleading.

As would be expected from the scenario above, few girls in Fort Hall dare to venture beyond the structure offered to them. These few aspire to pursue aviation (0.9%), interior design (0.9%), fashion and design (0.9%) and theatre arts (0.9%). The subjects related to these careers are not offered in this school and interestingly the professions of parents and siblings do not serve as examples either (see section 6.3.2). This therefore is a case of girls breaking away from convention. For these girls the reason motivating the choice is personality and creative abilities. The girls indicate that this should be matched to a particular kind of career. Of the three girls aspiring for a career in fashion and design one simply indicated “I think it suits me” while another indicated “I have always dreamed since I was a small girl”. Doing what one likes and thinks suits them is a bold choice, it affirms these choices as unusual
especially because the education system and socialisation literally prepares students for conventional careers.

These choices uphold the undervalued fact that the careers of the future lie in the informal sector better known as *Jua Kali* in Kenya. They demonstrate a career landscape that is changing because some girls are able to perceive beyond the conventional ‘career box’.

Lastly, the data show that the majority of girls (95.6%) have role models. Among these 73.5% include parents, siblings and relatives as well as successful people, professionals and public figures.

Ironically, siblings serve as a poor example as only 11.4% of the girls indicated they would emulate them, 31.6% are not sure. This can be linked to the level of education attainment and the careers that siblings are in. Siblings’ careers are likely to be unattractive. With the majority in teaching, it is no wonder that few girls want to follow in their footsteps.

For others the influential role of public figures is clear. The American short distance runner Marion Jones and the African-American world renowned pediatric neurosurgeon Dr Ben Carson are exposed to girls through the media and books. While this is positive exposure, these achievers are far removed from the context and realities of most Kenyan girls to adequately serve as role models. Quite clearly there is a gap to be filled with homegrown achievers like Lady Justice Joyce Aluoch, a prominent Kenyan judge, also the only public figure cited as a role model in this case study.

6.4.4.1 “My aspirations for my daughter”: A parents career perspective
Parents’ career aspirations match those of their daughters in terms of type and prestige. Mothers cite 19 and fathers 18 different types. The choices have more similarity than difference.

Out of the 64 mothers and 49 fathers that responded to this question 21.9% of mothers and 18.4% of fathers indicated a preference for medicine. Other choices within the medical field include nursing (12.9%) and pharmacy (3.1%). The percentage of parents who want their daughters to pursue engineering is as follows: fathers 10.2% and mothers 3.1%. While it is
the fathers that want this career more, the choice demonstrates how poorly informed parents are about their daughters’ preferences if one is to take into account that the key subjects required are mathematics and physics and they are the same subjects that few girls take and girls do not like (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2). Other choices requiring these subjects include information technology, the choice of 4.7% and 2.0% of mothers and fathers of respectively. The same pattern is demonstrated with accounting the career choice of 10.2% of the fathers and third choice for 9.4% of the mothers. It is at par with teaching yet the mathematics the required subject, is perceived negatively in Fort Hall. While mothers account for 56.2% and fathers 28.1% of those with secondary level education and below, the choices warrant questioning. The trend shows little awareness of girls’ abilities, preferences and perceptions. Given that this school has the highest percentage of parents with post secondary education, particularly mothers, the choices, even with the allowance for idealism, suggest that parental involvement in career choice matters is not taken seriously.

For a career that is considered ‘female’ the choice of a secretarial career by fathers (4.1%) and mothers (3.1%) is low. For mothers, journalism (4.7%) and law (4.7%) is venturing beyond the stereotypes. It is also interesting that fathers have accounting as a choice but not the two above. Fathers on the other hand, have choices in tours and travel (4.1%) banking (2.0%) and aviation (2.0%), which are all absent from mothers’ choices. Both parents have fashion and design as a choice with mothers at 1.6% and fathers 2%. It is likely that parental consensus is behind the confident reasons for the choice by the three girls earlier mentioned (see section 6.4.4).

Once again there are fathers (18.4%) and mothers (6.3%) who prefer to delay career decisions until their daughters have received their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education results. In this school more fathers take this position, which is likely to be finance related (see sections 5.3.3.3 and 7.3.3.4.2).

Generally, few mothers (3.1%) and fathers (4.1%) are without a career preference for their daughters. A low level of education does not hinder this. The preference patterns indicate two things: the choice of information technology and engineering suggest that mothers want more for their daughters than just the usual ‘female’ careers like teaching, secretarial and nursing, the choices of the mothers’ are more realistic in terms of academic abilities. This can
be related to the fact that mothers take on a more active role with respect on goings in school while fathers just pay school fees (see section 6.5.6.1).

In conclusion, there clear evidence that career exposure in Fort Hall is limited in quality. The choices show preference for traditional career types. This corresponds with girls’ and parental perceptions of careers and reflects societal perceptions. ‘Good and prestigious’ careers are equated with university degrees and that is why career information is based on the requirements for university admission. Though this is to be commended because it fosters high career aspiration, university education is a restricted career route. For a school like Fort Hall it endorses careers based on a competitive university selection as the only option yet it is so clear that the percentage of girls who actually pursue this level of education is negligible. This discriminates against those that do not have the potential or interest in university education and it fails to offer them alternative career options.

Lastly, while this phenomenon is not unique to this school why should it be in a single-sex girls’ school? Despite the ‘enabling learning environment’, career preparation in Fort Hall does not foster realistic career aspirations. There is a mismatch between girls’ academic abilities, subject preferences and career choices.

6.4.5 CONCLUSION FROM THE CASE PROFILES

Findings and conclusions drawn from the quantitative data are summarised below.

6.4.5.1 Who attends all girls’ schools?
- The girls who attend school at Fort Hall are aged between 15 and 19 years.
- The majority of girls are from rural homes with two parent families comprising four or five children. A fifth of the families are single parent families. At least a quarter of the girls are from an urban background. Fort Hall has the highest percentage of urban girls among the three schools (see sections 5.3.1 and 7.3.1).
- The majority of girls attended public primary schools in rural areas but a small minority had a private school education.
- The majority of girls have young mothers aged between 31–45 years but older fathers. Their families have more than one child in secondary school and the responsibility of school fees payment falls on the fathers.
• The girls are from families where the level of education attainment is higher among the males both for parents and siblings. The majority of mothers have secondary level education or below while the fathers hold college level education and above. The percentage of siblings with college level education and above is higher for brothers than it is for sisters. This has implications on girls education aspirations, particularly the level of education aspire to.

• Teaching, nursing and business are the careers of parents and siblings. However for siblings the high level of education does not correspond with their participation in professional careers. This has implications on girls’ education aspirations, particular and on career aspirations.

6.4.5.2 Girls view of single-sex education

• In terms of infrastructure Fort Hall is a well-established single-sex girls' school. It has a qualified, experienced staff that is relatively satisfied to be in the teaching career. This means that the there are no overt militating factors on girls education.

• Fort Hall is the school of choice for slightly more than half the girls but the ‘alternative school’ for close to another half. It is, however, also the school of choice for the majority of parents and is perceived by them as offering better education opportunities than they had.

• With the exception of a notable one fifth of the girls that find prep plain boring and academic activities not enjoyable, the majority of girls enjoy all academic and non-academic school activities.

• The support systems and the relationships between the School Principal, teachers and students vary and are somewhat fragile. This has implications on girls' educational development.

• The school has a predominantly female teacher profile. This kind of profile is said to favour girls in their education but in this school, it does not appear to be the case because the support of female teachers is generally low.

• The School Principal was not found to be overwhelmingly supportive although the fact that she was new in the school may have had something to do with this.

• Prefects are perceived as the least supportive group.
• The majority of girls like their parents and teachers rate the school curriculum highly and think highly of the computer studies. This has implications on subject choices and career aspirations.

6.4.5.3 Girls’ choices and preferences with regard to school subjects
• All the girls have favourite school subjects and only a minority places no value on school subjects, which suggest that perceptions about school subjects are very strong in this school.
• English, Biology and Commerce are the favourite subjects while Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry are the worst subjects for a large majority of girls. Physics is taken by less than 20% of the FIII and FIV, which suggests the extent to which it is a disliked subject.
• There is somewhat of a corresponding value made between subjects that are perceived as important and subjects that are favourites. This is the case with English, Biology and Mathematics and even Physics (refer to Gardner multiple intelligence theory).
• CRE, History, Home Science and Typing and Office Practice have low enrolment. At the same time they are not highly perceived as important subjects. They are also dying subjects in this school.
• The girls are not serious about science subjects; they regard them as difficult and meant for boys. This perception has implications on career choices.
• Parents appear to have little influence in shaping the career aspirations of their daughters, which partly explains the mismatch between scholastic ability, subject choices and career aspirations.
• The girls, like the majority of parents are satisfied with the school curriculum. However, of those who would like it expanded, more than half the girls want foreign languages and 10% would also like accounting, which for this school is being far fetched.

6.4.5.4 Girls’ career aspirations
• There is both a low key parental involvement and an equally low key awareness as far as girls’ education is concerned. Mothers have a slightly higher level of engagement in their daughters’ education but it is not consistent and is reflected in the career choices.
• The leading careers that girls aspire to pursue are in the medical field. Human medicine leads, followed by nursing, law, and pharmacy. Though mathematics and physics are considered worst subjects there is a career interest in accounting, information technology and even engineering. This shows a conflict between idealistic and realistic choices.

• The career choices of the parents somewhat match those of their daughters. Most parents’ choices lie in the medical field; in nursing, pharmacy and engineering. These choices show that parents are oblivious of their daughters' abilities and perceptions about related science subjects.

• The majority of girls have role models among parents, siblings and significant others.

6.4.5.5 Girls’ aspirations for higher education

• Less than 2% of the girls enrolled in this school proceed to university (see Appendix T), but the majority (78.1%) of girls aspire to pursue university education. A fifth (21%) want college level education. None of the girls (0%) want to remain with only a secondary level education.

6.5 A DISCUSSION OF EMERGING THEMES

6.5.1 THE RURAL SCHOOL AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The participants stated with pride that even though their school was not an urban school it was a good school that would enable them to achieve their educational dreams. They pointed out the infrastructure and qualified teachers as some of the features that made it a good school. In particular the FIII participants were unanimous that there was no real disadvantage in being in Fort Hall even though there were girls that still found it hard to accept that it was the school where they would receive their secondary schooling.

Fort Hall is not among the ‘Ivy League’ schools. However, Computer Studies is the hallmark of this rural secondary school. Unlike other schools in the country the participants argued that they had the opportunity of establishing a firm foundation for careers in computer science or information technology. Ironically, only two of the FGD participants aspire to pursue computer-related careers even though there is an awareness of the possibilities the subject offers. According to Lucy, “it [computer studies] enables me to become a computer engineer”.

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The Computer Studies class is small (see Table 6.2), in other words the subject is only accessible to a restricted number right from FI (see Appendix N). For many of the participants the boasting is about what they have in their school rather than what they do with what is offered. Subject access, however, is not of their making. According to the Head of Computer Studies the unavailability of qualified teachers, limited resources and high running costs restrict expansion. For this reason entry to a Computer Studies class is unreasonably competitive, only 20 students can be taken per class. It is unfortunate that this is a highly favoured subject in the school yet access is so restricted.

6.5.2 DISSENTING VOICES AND THE STRUGGLES WITHIN

As mentioned in an earlier Fort Hall is not the school of choice for 45.6% of the girls (see section 6.4.1) but among the participants there was satisfaction about the school. For some acceptance came because the preferred choice was closed:

When I did my KCPE I was called to a nice provincial day school but my guardian refused to take me there because she wanted me to change the environment. She also believed that when you come out of a boarding school you are much better than from a day school. I did not even know that a school like Fort Hall existed. But after I came here I accepted the fact that I am in a boarding school even though it was not of my kind. (Lucy FIV, Fort Hall).

The case above demonstrates that parents or guardians have the final say on the choice of school, and it demonstrates the preference for boarding schools. Education in a school that is not of ones choice challenges personal dreams and aspirations. Though the Lucy above claims to have settled this choice was made for her and it does undermine one’s full acceptance of the school. In fact in this school, it could be the reason why girls seem unsettled.

There are many voices of dissent in Fort Hall. Even though this is commonplace within schooling culture the voices in Fort Hall are ingrained in the social dynamics. While the school choice factor has much to do with it, the backgrounds that the girls come from are not homogenous, this combined with their acceptance or non-acceptance of the school converges on the social dynamics of everyday school life.
Hard work and the call to diligence on the one hand comes into conflict with intimidating peer pressure to conform to other sub cultures:

It is like in Fort Hall when you cooperate in doing wrong things they [students] are happy. But if you do not do wrong things than you better fly from them and do your own things, which will benefit you (Charity FIII, Fort Hall).

Besides the dynamics that govern peer behaviour, the fear of parents and their harsh reaction to poor performance, the rules and regulations guiding learning and leisure in single-sex boarding schools are constantly contested. Charity points to an unspoken culture, a sub-culture which is the unofficial governing culture in Fort Hall. It contradicts the concerted efforts made to create a successful girls’ school! A typical scenario of how this undermining culture operates is described below:

Some people might be having good groups but others might be talking about them, so people normally fear to be in groups … girls normally fear because they are fearing their names to be discussed (Nancy FIII, Fort Hall).

The culture is entrenched in a ‘move with the crowd’ mentality, so even though single-sex schools are somewhat protected from overt militating factors these kinds of sub-cultures that are from within undercut the opportunity for success.

Another related voice is found in the perceptions related to work ethic and schooling activities in particular to academic work. For some girls in the school there is no respect or purpose for serious study, neither for their own nor for that of others:

In this school it is like there are two groups, those who want to read and others who like discouraging those who want to read. Maybe when you extend in class, you hear them calling you “swottie, chop … what!” (laughing) … now you feel discouraged (Stellah FIII, Fort Hall).

While the teachers attributed this phenomenon to girls’ inability to cope with schoolwork and in many instances to general laziness, the focus group discussions revealed that girls from rich families had an upper hand in determining the learning culture in class and in the school. Many of them tended to be loud and quite successful at crowd pulling:

Working in this school, it will depend on your background. Coz some people when they come here they do not bother to read. They do not bother what they get. Maybe some just come to class, make noise. They do not care whether you are reading or not. And so it is your own to try and do your own things, to try and study alone to just try and create your own things (Stellah FIII, Fort Hall).

Although Stellah’s observations do not point out any overtly wrong actions, the subtle elements within social dynamics are the ones that undermine. These seemingly harmless
actions become deeply ingrained aspects within the fabric of schooling in Fort Hall and interfere with gainful schooling experiences and academic success. Wasting time, weak and disorganized study groups; unchallenged beliefs and attitudes, idleness and gossip are some of the things elicited from the group. According to the FIII group these kinds of girls easily control the learning culture by infusing attitudes that are converse to the demands and ethics of hard work. They are subtle but controlling. They counteract what is known to be ‘right’ by mocking those who want to study and by the derisive labelling of good learning attitudes and habits. Where they manage to destabilise good habits the result is widespread apathy to learning and education in general. The result is that the girls find it difficult to make sacrifices for their education, which is the case in Fort Hall.

According to the School Principal the girls in her school “do not want the pain”. Pain refers to a phrase she uses often during the morning assembly. During one morning assembly that I attended she reiterated ‘no pain no glory’ in her motivational talk. Such talk appears to make girls think differently about their education but then the process to change is slow because a school is merely one among many other institutions that must transform their thinking, particularly with regard to their identity as women.

Asked to show places where such change is evident, the School Principal linked the differences between schools to socio-culture and to the history of education. She went on to point out that in Murang’a district schools are heavily gendered:

I think there is something to do with where the school is. If you look at all the other schools Naromoro, the Kangubiri, Tumutumu [similar schools in Nyeri district in the same province] the education there is taken more seriously than it is Murang’a district. You will find that there is a division in Nyeri for instance that is called ‘Mathira ma Githomo’ [literally ‘Mathira of Education’, or in paraphrase ‘Mathira division where education is a top priority’]. School Principal, Fort Hall.

Her analysis corresponds with observations made by the Dean of Studies and other teachers in Yellowwood (see section 5.5.4.2).

With the FIV group there was the common feeling that because they are women they did not need to have high aspirations because they would eventually get married. For societies that follow patriarchal systems marriage determines a women’s identity so the pressure to become wives and mothers is not unusual among girls. While this particular attribution was a reference to other girls that they know of and not themselves the attempt to distance
themselves indicated the dissenting voices in their own lives. Recollections of an old school mate whose father would not take the daughter to secondary school because he argued, she would get married and instead went on to invest in the education of the sons, who all of whom pursued a college level education, underscores this reality. In addition, the fact that girls in Fort Hall contentedly declare, “after all I will get married, so there is no need of struggling. There is no need of studying” shows that marriage is a serious alternative to education should the latter become a difficult challenge.

Quite clearly, the challenges with girls’ education in Fort Hall arise out of the schooling culture but also out of broader factors that have more to do with socialisation. In this particular school, the social and cultural values attached to marriage and family life is strong (see section 6.5.5.3 for a more discussion on girls and marriage). This gendered socialisation is influential in the construction of self-identity, perceptions and values. While is reinforced by home background, a single sex environment is supposed to be a safe-guard but in this case it appears not to be.

The consequences of these undercurrents and sub-cultures become visible in the ways that girls make their education choices. They select subjects and aspire for careers without much regard for their preparedness or ability (see discussion in section 6.4.4). Among the focus group participants, there is such evidence in the profiles of Pauline, Charity and Irene (see Appendix J).

6.5.2.1 “The royals and the villagers”: Social classes at Fort Hall
Society is laden with values that position men and women differently vis-à-vis relations and roles. Schools are a part of the society and in Fort Hall there are certain values that girls hold. Although the school does not encourage it, the Deputy Principal from her observation of the girls links these values to the home background, which in this school, is contested. These self-made perceptions appear important as far as the projection of the self is concerned:

Majority of our girls are from the rural areas, that is the greatest catchments area and the few that we have from the urban are those who come seeking placement. These are in the minority and yet you find that they are the yuppies. They want to be in a class of their own. They want to lord it over others that they are better off, simply because they are from urban areas. (Deputy Principal, Fort Hall).
According to the Deputy Principal, girls from “comfortable” social backgrounds lack motivation and “seem to assume that it is always going to be that way. There will always be someone providing … these are the girls that move without direction, without purpose.” The superiority complex or haughtiness that is characteristic of girls from rich families is demonstrated in social forums:

Some will even try to impress others; maybe on Saturday when there is entertainment, they will even push others to go into the hall to dance instead of going to Christian Union or Catholic Action to pray. They want to show how they know how to dance, how they are rich. They do not concentrate with their education (Peris FIII, Fort Hall).

Social class plays a significant role in Fort Hall in facilitating genuine and forced socialisation:

… there is the problem of social class in the school. They feel that others should not be known what their background is. It is because maybe they want to stay with those who are from privileged families and they do not want to be seen as coming from a disadvantaged class (Mrs G, teacher Fort Hall).

While it was clear from discussions with the Head of Guidance and social class differentiation runs deep in Fort Hall, penetrating the problem was said to be difficult because “girls do not share their problems and to convince them that they can tell somebody, it is very hard”.

The significance of social class and the impact it has on girls’ education choices is played out in the love/hate relationship with the privileged or well-to-do girl. For some the “royals” constitute those admitted into the school through the backdoor and so they have no value for education. They derive no enjoyment from academic work particularly prep but they are an influential group and a yardstick of what is ‘cool’ because of their extravagance lifestyle. It is likely that these are the third who do not consider Fort Hall their school of their choice but they determine the direction of the sub cultures. The following excerpt demonstrates the pressure one group wields over others:

I think some girls are influenced by the others when they come here they come with things, some they have never even seen them. When you look at your background, you may judge your parents that they do not offer enough help to you. So you may decide not to come back to school. Some may not respect their parents (Pauline FIII, Fort Hall).

This kind of distraction in boarding school, more particularly in Fort Hall where the majority of students are from rural backgrounds, adds some of the contradictions to single-sex schooling in contexts like the Kenyan one. While the effects of social class differentiation on education are predictable there are assumptions that single-sex schooling is protected, but this is not the case. This is somewhat of a paradox within single-sex schooling. There is on the
one hand equal education opportunity but on the other there is the question of how equally accessible the schooling is.

Recounting her schooling experiences the School Principal indicated that though her academic ability enabled her to access an exclusive girls' school in the early seventies, what she referred to as a “high-class” school, her poor background made life difficult. Though aware that she could access all the education opportunities on an equal basis with other girls her poor family background was conspicuous. The intimidating feeling that comes with being “socially different”, irrespective of the compassion, shown, is overwhelming:

I found myself getting donations from other students’… even nightgowns. I used to get them from my friend who thought that I needed those things. After one year, I settled and I picked and I was able to study without any problems (School Principal, Fort Hall).

Unlike the girls in her school, she confronted and addressed the challenges of her socio-economic background but not without difficulty. Clearly her settling in the school was prolonged and punctuated with interruptions because of constant comparisons with those from a privileged background: “here I am, I do not have what this one has”.

The sense of isolation within single-sex schools is real especially in terms of social class. Coupled with this is the perception built from these differentiating experiences and the effect it has on schooling in general and education choices and decisions. As she puts it, “the real interruptions are these ones in the mind”.

Having attempted to become an agent of her own empowerment I asked her how she deals with similar problems in her school to which she responded:

I talk to my girls here because there are some that come from good [privileged] families and we raise some things. Like I am very proud that there is a girl here in FII, Beatrice could not even afford a pen. She could not even afford a pair slippers, she could not even buy bar of soap. One day I talked to the girls in the assembly and we bought things in cartons, which we now give to the girl every Friday when she comes for them. This is what we are saying to most of them who have problems. In April we went for a Harambee [fund raising] in Nyeri for a girl in my school that could not raise school fees. It is only about Ksh20, 000 [US$ 250] a year but still she could not raise the money. We have a few girls who are really quite poor. We have others who are orphans. They live in a home. The fees are paid but the other details, it is us who try to help (School Principal, Fort Hall)

While her action demonstrates the power of agency and is a genuine effort on her part to reduce the material differences that distinguish girls within boarding schools, where poverty
intersects on education the challenges of coping become greater for girls. It is clear that education within single-sex schools is not necessarily equally accessible to all. Social issues are among the education concerns the girls in this school find particularly difficult to cope with. They indicated that illness in the family, the lack of school fees and pocket money preoccupied their thoughts and interfered with their studies, especially concentration in class. The girls went on to add that they lacked adequate forums to present these social issues and found class meetings particularly unfavourable. Literature on girls’ education in Africa agrees that gender imbalances in education are largely reduced or increased by aggravating socio-economic circumstances. However, the literature on single-sex education overlooks these kinds of circumstances because it assumes that single-sex education is privileged. This case clearly demonstrates that single-sex sex education is both privileged and unprivileged, accessible and inaccessible.

In her evaluation of socio-economic related problems in the school, the Head of the Technical Department observed that teachers fail to understand girls because they do not bother. Although she attempted to blame the problem on large classes because they made it difficult to deal with girls’ problems at the individual level, she felt that teachers sometimes failed to remember that girls are growing up and experience social and personal problems that are common with adolescence. She argued, “some teachers may not even know what to do because they have forgotten the psychology they learnt in college.” These observations correspond with the unaffected attitude and indifference teachers show towards guidance and counselling and to involvement in the programme (see section 6.4.4) and confirm why education in this school is not equally accessible.

6.5.3 REACTIONS TO EDUCATION DEMANDS AND EXPECTATIONS

The significance of FIII and FIV within the 8-4-4 system of education has been discussed in the previous chapter (see section 5.4.3). From the discussions so far it is apparent that girls view education variously. The social and economic background plays a particularly significant role in creating girls identities. In the section following I examine how girls view themselves with respect to their academic abilities, education choices and aspirations, and the role of examinations vis-à-vis the demands and expectations on academic attainment.
6.5.3.1 “A student who is serious can make it”: Managing the academic crunch

Single-sex schools are symbolic of successful schooling meaning a good learning culture and good academic results. In this school, the social culture is a constant challenge to this achievement. The observation cited below demonstrates how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation operates in Fort Hall:

The girls in the school are very responsible but when it comes to the education part of it, they are not responsible. I tend to think it is because once you refuse to do your duty you will be in for a punishment and there will be a consequence for that. But now in academics, nobody will ever tell you “come here I punish you because you never attained this grade.” You will just be left alone. Because of the consequences that will follow they are more responsible in their punctuality than in their education (Anne FIV, Fort Hall).

Collectively, girls in Fort Hall are not aggressive and lack sustained intrinsic motivation for academic pursuits. They appear to work hard only when they have an interest in something or are closely monitored. The FIII participants pointed out that the so-called “soft” teachers and the school rules that are not strictly adhered to compound laxity among girls. Such loopholes encourage the laissez-faire attitude that leads to wanting academic performance.

In the observations of the FIV participants, the “majority [of girls] do not know the meaning of education … they do not care much”. They are only serious with the end of term examinations and not with assessment tests because “they are used in failing assessment tests”. Only in the desperation to pass important examinations do attitudes change: “… you see at the end of the term when they have the main exam, they seem to be studying very hard because they want to pass”.

The girls in Fort Hall understand their privileged status, they even argue that “a student who is serious can make it because all teachers are qualified like those who are in the other schools”. However, they do not take academic work seriously especially if “the teacher is not harsh”. Given that girls’ perceptions of teacher support vary, one would assume that the supportive teachers are those perceived to be harsh which would be the case with the female teachers 25.6% of whom are found to be unsupportive (see section 6.4.1.2). The extent to which this kind of support is perceived as being given also appears to determine the level of seriousness given to a school subject:

I can say it depends, if the teacher is serious and he or she checks her work, girls are serious with assignments and they will complete but if teacher does not question whether they do it or not, the girls do not do (Lucy FIV, Fort Hall).
Many students do not finish assignments, because they plan on how to cheat the teacher or to skive his lesson (Charity FIII, Fort Hall).

Teacher/student relationships are delicate by nature but in this school, this is exemplified by suspicion and mistrust. According to Mrs. I there are two sides to this relationship. On the one hand, “as long as you are close to them girls tend to be humble and to like your subject”. However, girls misinterpret this closeness and become intrusive “once you enter the classroom the trend is ‘good morning girls’, a greeting to which a similar response is expected. Pleasantries such as ‘you are smart today … you look so happy … how are your children?’” are deviations that for her overstep the mark. From her teaching experiences Mrs I was adamant on the importance of keeping a distance in teacher/student relationships. She convincingly argued that “in these interactions there have to be limits for learning to take place … once they become close they tend to deviate and once they deviate no learning is going to take place”. Her position on this matter is more than just an option because relationships become abused as observed by one of the girls:

Other girls are even making friends with teachers, especially men so you cannot fear the teacher because you know she is the friend (Peris IV, Fort Hall).

The teacher’s role in ensuring that learning takes place is a thorny issue. Taking blame away from teachers is the easier way out, more so if girls do not excel in their academic performance:

The girls here are not hardworking. It is like you have to do everything for them. In fact, they are not creative … it is like you have to do the whole project for them and I feel this is not the way it should be … these girls are lazy and lack self motivation (Computer studies teacher, Fort Hall).

It is apparent that girls respond variously to academic demands and expectations. However, even though they may have academic inability, they could achieve more but are hindered from doing so by their social setbacks, unchallenged and unchanged attitudes and perceptions, slackness and a lack of sincere motivation from teachers. The implications to these experiences on the choice and decisions of school subjects are discussed below.

6.5.4 SCHOOL SUBJECTS AND CAREERS: THE CHOICES AND DECISIONS

The choice of subjects made in FIII is a education decision that can be linked to the overall schooling experiences that begins in FI.
As pointed out in the profile section of this chapter, there are sufficient resources in Fort Hall however, just because all girls have equal access to these facilities does not lead to favourable experiences that are equal, much as such investment is intended to enhance similar experiences and similar benefits.

With regard to subject preference there are many factors that come into play. Discussions with the FIII group revealed that in FI there is generally conflicting information as far as school subjects are concerned. This early socialisation into the school curriculum plays a big part in shaping perceptions:

When I came in FI I met some people saying that physics and maths is hard … when I started learning the introduction of physics my mind was telling me “obvious physics is difficult because it concerns mathematics”. So that thing affected me. So when we entered FII and we started doing those calculations, I saw physics is not an easy subject (Charity FIII, Fort Hall).

On the other hand for some participants, choice determines perception and what one perceives merely depends on where they stand:

For those girls who are interested and for those who know why they came here, the subjects offered are good because for example sciences we usually do all of them and even have laboratories. Now you see if you are interested you can do your best and even get a good job (Lucy FIII, Fort Hall).

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 show subject choice and preferences. Questioned about their choice of Social Ethics and Education (SEE), Christian Religious Education (CRE) and Agriculture some of the participants simply said they selected them in order to pass. Though these subjects have dwindling enrolment they serve as an assurance to girls that they can pass in KCSE.

Other subject choices are based on workload. The perception that a particular subject “does not need to do a lot of work” is a popular yardstick. Subject enrolment patterns show that it has been used in subjects like Home Science, Typing and Office Practice. These are subjects with a practical component that requires extra effort from the student. Interestingly, the case is not the same for Computer Studies but I would argue that it is because it is a new subject that takes a restricted number of students making it competitive and not subject to the perception that the workload is large. The participants also indicated that girls in general take a keen interest in biology because unlike physics and chemistry it does not have many calculations. They said, “it talks about things that we are aware of and in touch with. Things
to do with our body and environment.” In their thinking one requires forethought to study physics in FIII given the pervading negative attitude. Only the highly focused and unyielding types like Lucy – the child of a single mother farmer with a secondary level of education – attempt to look beyond the branded status and visualise the career prospects:

I took physics because it goes with my career. I want to be an engineer (Lucy FIII, Fort Hall).

Arguments posited by the literature on single-sex schools suggest that branding subjects is minimal because learning takes place in conducive environments. In this case, according to the Head of Guidance and Counselling, it is a common trend in this school.

Close examination of girls’ experiences of Physics and Mathematics suggests that the teaching and learning of the subject is problematic. The participants said that there were too many formulas to “cram”, others cited lack of time which is a lame excuse for girls in a boarding school. Probed further they mentioned words like “mixed up”, “not practicing”, “fear”, “lack of comprehension”, “not concentrating” in their descriptions of what went on in mathematics classrooms. The following statement captures the frustrating and unrewarding experience in the learning of mathematics:

You get mathematics when the teacher is in class, but when the examination comes you do not get (Leonida FIV, Fort Hall).

Although the feeling of ‘blankness’ is not uncommon in the learning of mathematics, the lack of concentration in the classroom, which has already been attributed to social and personal problems, complicates the problem but again these experiences are not unique to mathematics even though they quite obviously derail learning more profoundly.

While one could argue that the girls in this school lack the inherent ability for the subject and are predisposed to the learning of others this is not reflected in the academic achievement patterns in the school (see Appendix R). In the case of mathematics one tends to agree with the observations of the mathematics teachers that the girls are simply lazy:

It is not intellectual inability. If they could practice, have that interest because practice is all there is in mathematics. They are lazy, they do not want to go that extra mile and do something on their own (Mrs N, Mathematics teacher, Fort Hall).

When it comes to sciences and mathematics, I do not think the girls do a lot of practice and that is why they do poorly compared to the boys (Head of Guidance and Counselling, Fort Hall)
Table 6.2 shows widespread dislike for mathematics and science subjects. While participants blame the pattern on negative peer influence they report at the same time having no regrets about choice of subjects. Many admitted they believed mathematics was a hard subject meant for boys but went on to argue that the presence of boys in their classrooms would make a difference to their learning because “the boys would challenge”.

These views convey the dichotomies in girls’ schools. It is therefore important to examine why a ‘safe and enabling’ single-sex environment while appearing to meet academic needs do not do so particularly well in critical subjects like mathematics and sciences. These participants to a large extent mirror the perceptions of the majority of the FIII and FIV as per the descriptive statistics (see 6.4.3). In this connection more questions that need to be raised. First, why with these kinds of attitudes do girls in this school want careers that require mathematics, science subjects? Second, are the factors that contribute to their attitudes internally or externally motivated?

Some participants put the blame on the school. They argued that another school would change their current academic plight, “if I can go to MaryHill [a national girls school] I know the education there can be full of challenge”. Further extrapolations about themselves yielded comments like “girls are comfortable”, “girls fear” and “girls are not disciplined, they lack principles and determination”. These indicate that the preferential treatment of subjects arises out of a lack of motivation. On the one hand the girls appear to be saying that there is no challenge in Fort Hall but what is really the case is that they fail to take the challenge. Seemingly, merely attending a single-sex girls’ school does not guarantee academic excellence.

Schools have complex dynamics and while it is important to examine the values and perceptions that girls hold about their education teaching and management of priorities are equally important as far as school subject and career choice decisions are concerned.

In the focus group discussions the teachers accepted their role in perpetuating dichotomous that are seen to be of the girls own making. However, the statement “you start getting serious once you are in FIII and FIV”, as observed by a senior teacher, shows where priorities lie. Generally, the participating teachers all agreed that these two forms get more attention and
even better quality teaching. They argued that this is a structure born out of the competitive demands of the Kenyan education system. This undue attention on a single form in particular has its own consequences. Girls tend to think that it is only in FIV that serious work is required and have gone as far as to object to remedial teaching over the school holidays for FIII classes! While there may be a genuine concern to catch up with lost year these seemingly good intentions are in fact twisted priorities. The seriousness with which education should be taken is delayed and whatever remedial teaching is undertaken is on a foundation that need not have been poorly laid in the first place. On the part of the girls there is irresponsibility as academic seriousness is delayed because they believe that they can be eventually ‘salvaged’. The focus by teachers on FIV is literally stealing from the lower forms because what it does is provide an opening for the preferential treatment of subjects like mathematics and science. The time, energy and resources meant to ground FI and FII is shifted to FIV. The relegation of the lower classes to teachers inexperienced in teaching compounds the problem further:

If there are teachers on teaching practice like there are six of them at the moment, they are given the lower classes. The understanding is that they have little experience. Every department assigns a teacher to assist but to a large extent the TP teacher is left alone. There is no close monitoring. We put a lot of emphasis on the FIII and FIV and the reason is that education in Kenya is exam oriented that is first and foremost (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

Although the academic priorities are shaky because ‘salvaging’ girls without a foundation is futile the reason ought to be seen within the larger scheme of things, particularly how education is viewed in Kenya:

Keeping all factors constant, the student comes here to pass exams [emphasis mine] so little time is spent with FI. In fact it is rare to give them remedial teaching. Sometimes some teaching time is not spent teaching but with FIII and FIV you hear even the teacher saying, “No, this is not a good trend with the FIII and FIV”. Again the curriculum is so wide in FI and FII such that they have so many subjects so they are taught a little bit of each of those subjects compared to FIII and FIV where there is specialisation (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

In Fort Hall progression from FI to FIV is weighted and examinations play a critical role in the weighting that determines how teaching time is allotted. Preparing the FIV class for public examinations takes precedence over effective teaching in FI and FII. The acquisition of high grades in the national examination motivates remedial teaching for FIV. The challenges of a meritocratic education system demand desperate measures pointed out below by the mathematics teacher:
… eliminate the E’s that we have because they are quite a number. We try the best we can to ensure that the students at least get a D or a D minus (Ms N, teacher Fort Hall).

The drilling of students to pass examinations is rampant in education systems where merit is the basis for education advancement. While some teachers are of the thinking that drilling students in FI and FII will result in them loving subjects equally it is likely to bear little fruit unless out-of-class factors are also addressed.

All in all, remedial teaching seems to be both for teachers and girls a desperate sacrifice to catch up with lost time. The academic challenges in this school lie with mathematics and science subjects and while remedial teaching extends to all subjects for teachers it is a sacrifice to salvage the image of their subjects and that of their school. This is because national examinations tend to have a negative impact on teachers whose subjects are failed as illustrated by the mathematics teacher below:

When I came here, the performance was not very good in mathematics and the number of E’s used to be – if you had 110 students the E’s would be 90. You know that staggering figure over the years we have been able to reduce it, not by a very large margin … we have reduced it by ten. Last year there were 26 E’s so that is an achievement because we have created the interest that was not there (Mr M, teacher Fort Hall).

In depth discussions also revealed that the girls were aware of other career-related opportunities brought by learning subjects not currently offered in Fort Hall. The focus group participants articulated that foreign languages opened up prospects to lucrative careers, particularly in foreign countries. While they expressed positive perceptions about them few girls in the written questionnaire showed interest in related careers (see section 6.4.4). Drawing from the participants the ignorance is from a lack of information of career opportunities more than anything else.

Throughout the focus group discussions the participants consistently branded the subjects they felt were better suited to boys as “difficult”. The FIV group argued that families reinforce this fear “in some families there are some traditions … they believe that there are some jobs that are meant for girls and others for boys”. Asked how their parents would react to them if they chose to become mechanics, drivers, radio technicians or pilots the girls said that it was fine to be a pilot but for the other jobs they kept quiet and smiled knowingly. Further questions on their perceptions of metalwork, woodwork and drawing and design did not elicit interest: one participant stated that such subjects are difficult and therefore only
suitable for boys. This response explained the earlier silence and knowing smiles: it was an indication that gendered career patterns are for them quite normal.

The perceptions that girls hold about career and school subjects are riddled with contradictions. Although some are lured by what they perceive to be the promise of a high status, the fear of being different limits their perceptions and grasp of the opportunities that education can offer. Although one third of the focus group participants aspire to pursue careers in the medical field (see Table 6.1 and 6.2), which also matches the third in the written questionnaire findings (see section 6.4.4), perceptions towards mathematics and science subjects remain the most compelling factor as far as career prospects are concerned. The negative perception towards science and mathematics limits career prospects for girls and is the reason why they make choices that are somewhat idealistic.

6.5.5 EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS: THE PARADOXES

This section examines the interplay between school subjects, tertiary or higher education, careers aspirations and the absence of significant female figures in girls’ education.

6.5.5.1 The illusion in university education

We have a minority and it is minority that ends up in university. There are years when we do not even get any student going to the university. The others, especially if their parents are of financial capability will go to middle level colleges to do nursing and teacher training. The others are the ones who disappear into oblivion (Deputy Principal, Fort Hall).

Only a minority pursues university education in Fort Hall. While this might be attributed to the fact that the majority of girls do not meet the minimum requirement for admission to public universities, other factors render this coveted level of education nothing more than an illusion. These factors, while clear to the Deputy Principal, are not clear to the teachers who pin the problem on poor performance.

Although the large majority of girls in this school want to pursue a university education (see section 6.4.2), discussions with participants give a different perspective.

According to the participants study duration is key factor and the length of time it takes to complete a degree course was found by most to be unappealing.
I feel it is because, take subject like medicine; it takes something like six years. After six years, you tarmac and tarmac [job hunting] and you never end up with good job … you end up doing jua kali [self-employment] or kibarua [casual labour] (Nancy FIII, Fort Hall).

For university education in Kenya, additional delays caused by strikes and the possibility of joblessness thereafter makes university education unattractive. In addition, the possibility of joining the informal Jua Kali sector is demeaning for a university graduate. The reasoning appears to be, why invest in all that time and money when you could do the same sooner for less?

The landscape of university education in Kenya has changed in the last five years (see Chapter 3) and the establishment of private universities and parallel degree programmes\(^\text{12}\) has also impacted on increasing disinterest in public university education:

Another reason why we not like to go to university is because, let us say I had an ‘A’ and you see the university will take even someone with a ‘D’ and you will be in the same class … there is no to need of being with someone with a ‘D’ and he or she is not supposed to be there in the first place (Anne FIV, Fort Hall).

The stiff merit selection criterion associated with intelligence and high performance has yielded to the commercialisation of degrees. As such, the high value attached to university education has become eroded and university degrees cheapened:

I want to go to university but I cannot continue with my education in Kenya because they do not offer good education (Sylviah FIII, Fort Hall).

These factors, in addition to an uninterrupted study explain the preference for college education among participants:

Most people prefer to go to college because it takes a shorter time. Maybe you will even get a job and you won’t feel the pinch if you went to college for two years and you stayed jobless, like the one who went to university for six years and you are staying jobless both of you (Kajumbi FIV, Fort Hall).

According to the Head of Guidance and Counselling the increasing number of jobless graduates deters girls from wanting university education. The extent to which apathy to university education is entrenched in Fort Hall is evident from the experiences of the Head of Guidance and Counselling. She said that they have had problems with girls not wanting to fill

\(^{12}\) Degree programmes run by public universities that are not subsided by the government and open to anyone who can afford to pay the exorbitant fee.
out university application forms. This reality is made clear to the School Principal through her own daughter:

Mum there is no need of studying and going to the university because after all, these days even those who have gone to the universities are still at home. They have no jobs (School Principal, Fort Hall).

While the pursuit of higher education is a personal choice one questions why the interest is low among girls in single sex-schools! Of course there is the attribution to academic performance for which Fort Hall lacks a legacy and then there is the history of university education, which again is lacking in this school. Out of 51 girls in FIV, 17 (33.3%) do not wish to pursue university education. Asked why, the Dean of Studies gave the following reasons that are pale in the face of the stark socio-economic realities in Kenya:

… you can imagine you being a teacher in a class where 40% do not want to be in university. I want us to ask ourselves, “where do they want to go?” This is a very poor precedent in the school because as the Dean of Studies, our aim is to make all girls achieve the highest academic standards. Now here is a self-declared girl “I do not want to go to the university”, again the comment will bring us back to the greater social economic problems, which are there. Some of these girls have relatives whom they have seen going to the university. Other girls have seen that you can achieve without a university degree or something. They are seeing teachers saying that they are poorly paid and so they will go on strike yet they are holders of degrees and diplomas. So they think if I go to the university I will be like this teacher. It is not a good aspiration not to go to the university, but again I am calling for research on this to be brought to the attention of the policy makers so that as they make their policies they will create other avenues where the girls can go (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

Unlike teachers, parents do not appear to know of the changed landscape in university education, and while they do not push girls to choose university education they do not appear to encourage them in any particular way as far as higher education is concerned. The participants complained, “they [parents] don’t give moral support … they give you all things you need but that moral support they just tell you to work hard”. While negligence is characteristic of their overall attitude towards the education of their daughters it is an attribute of their understanding of their roles in their daughters’ education, which can be linked to the level of education. This is especially the case among mothers (see section 6.3.2) most of whom do not have sufficient education to understand the rapidly changing dynamics and the action needed. According to the teacher participants, the kind of parents that bother are those that they refer to as “learned”. Only among these “you hear cases where a girl says ‘my parents said that I should take this subject’”. They are the few reported to be variously proactive:
I had one whose daughter is going to do ‘A’ levels in Kampala in Uganda. That shows that they know that out there their girls can go ahead (School Principal, Fort Hall).

Parents have an important role to play in assisting their daughters make choices about post-secondary education but according to the Head of Guidance few of them follow up: “the majority are not bothered or some just ignore ... many are not keen on this responsibility”. Evidently, few parents give quality attention to their daughters’ education, which contradicts the written questionnaire findings that show high levels of parental involvement (see section 6.4.4.1) and equally high educational aspirations for them (see section 6.4.2). The qualitative data show the quality of involvement that pertains important education decisions to be low. Teachers indicated too that “there are few parents who still think that higher education is not necessary”. This explains why parents relegate the responsibility of their daughters’ education to teachers, leading to typical scenarios like the one below:

*Mwalimu* [teacher], now that my daughter got a D plus what would you advise me that I tell her? (School Principal, Fort Hall).

**6.5.5.2 Girls career aspirations: the dreams and the realities**

… (emphasis) you can’t like to be like somebody who is interfering with dirt and compare with somebody else who is doing a white collar job. So you prefer to be in that kind of work of white-collar job (Stellah FIII, Fort Hall).

Like Stellah many of the participants perceive white-collar office jobs as superior because they do not involve “dirt” or manual labour. The participants also believe that “those who work in offices have jobs that are not tiring yet the salary high”. This thinking underpins their naïve reasons for career choice (see section 6.4.4). For Stellah, a city girl, this thinking might be allowed, however, it is difficult to understand because the majority of girls (56.1%) in the school come from rural backgrounds and a district where the economy is agriculture based. They also have parents who are farmers (6.4%) or engaged in professions that involve manual labour or ‘dirt’ (see section 6.3.2). These discrepancies are better understood when family influence on education choices is examined.

Carol (from information salvaged from the inaudible tapes) wants a career in pharmacy because of the influence of her cousins and aunts and even grandmother. In her case family background appears to have influenced her career aspirations but only those she perceives as doing well in white-collar jobs have the influence. For Stellah and counterparts blue-collar jobs do not offer the desired prestige and money. Given that they probably draw their
perceptions from what they see of agriculture in a depressed economy then “dirt” jobs would be unattractive. Blue-collar jobs are perceived as an alternative only “if I fail to enter the job of accountant I will enter the area of *jua kali* [informal sector] and be a businessman.”

Asked how they hoped to achieve their job aspirations with negative attitudes to key subjects like mathematics, the girls had no comments. Further questions on their choice and perceptions of careers were met with answers like “I am planning to do a number of maths per day so as I may improve my grade in maths.” While the effort is recognised the perception that the lack of hard work is the problem raises more questions about the basic understanding the girls have about schooling and preparedness in terms of information about the job market.

The girls in Fort Hall appear to lack a basic understanding of what their education is for and somewhat contradicts the outcomes expected of single-sex schooling. In fact it demonstrates that the basis of female education achievement is more bound by context than it is by the school, and single-sex education does not prevail upon the latter rather it is overwhelmed by context.

### 6.5.5.3 “Not many women have made it”: Consequences of female absence

The family can and does play an important role in influencing career choices. Among the participants the role of female role models was distinctly absent from the experiences of the girls, a feature I considered worth examining.

While the participants are of the strong opinion that “any woman can do what they do if only they try” girls look up to women who have excelled and the reality as expressed by Anne, is that “it is not many women who have made it.” This is confirmed by the absence of female role models of Kenyan origin that they can identify with (see section 6.4.4).

Although the participants were quick to identify the difficulties of dual roles and at the same time showed an awareness of the gender implications on work and career pursuits they felt that “women are tied down by their families”: a truth that is very real in their school.

Earlier sections of this chapter indicate that learning is sometimes challenging for the girls leading to their giving up and declarations like “after all I will get married. So there is no need of struggling. There is no need of studying” indicate that marriage is considered an
alternative when learning becomes challenging. While some may consider marriage a viable alternative, the experiences of those outside school indicate otherwise:

I do not think girls are thinking anything like that [marriage] because if you hear the girls, even those who stay outside the school. They say they must have something. They do not term marriage as the most important thing to depend. I normally hear them say that they will depend on themselves. No matter what the job they will do (Lucy FIV, Fort Hall).

The empowerment of women through education is not new, and neither is the perception that women are dependants. Perhaps because of what they see in their own homes education (see section 6.3.2) is perceived to provide the means to this empowerment and independence that girls want. Needless to say, abilities come between them and their dreams but they continue to perceive the challenge as a lack of hard work or persistent sacrifice. While it may be true that they could do more to improve their academic performance there is more to the creation of independent women than grinding academic work.

According to the Dean of Studies, 60 and 70% of the girls from Fort Hall end up in marriage or have children within the first two years of leaving school. The following are observations in his experience as a class teacher and mentor over a six-year period:

I have been here since 1997 and when I came here I became a class teacher of a form one class (FI). I went with those girls until the year 2000 when they left the school having finished form four (FIV). I was very close with them. The class had 38 girls. Right now, I can tell you where 23 of them are, because they have kept in touch, sometimes we meet with them. Out of those 38, 20 are already either with children or married. Three have invited me to attend their weddings … so you can imagine in that short duration. I am talking of just the other year. So that is why I am saying about 60% and above end up in marriage (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

In his assessment of this delicate matter the Dean of Studies, attributed the ‘marriage alternative’ to societal expectations and the way girls are socialised. Seemingly, even in communities where education is highly valued the expectations on women are the same: childbearing and motherhood. For those caught up in an unyielding education investment conflict is inevitable and marriage is unarguably, a better an alternative to a dead end road:

I think there is an attitude, depending on where this girl comes from, most of them feel that a girl is second hand to man so to say … and ‘after all I will get married and everything will be provided.’ That is the attitude I am talking of. It has trickled down to the academics. The fact that in our community [Kikuyu] once a girl is married, she is provided for or is supposed to be provided for; a fact that they know themselves. (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

The scenario described reflects the social, economic and cultural factors that underpin the values, beliefs and perceptions that shape girls’ education choices.
The perception that girls are merely female is gendered but it is, however flawed, the self-perception among females:

You see, the society and more so in my area Murang’a. I think there is still a tendency to treat girls as a second or weaker sex. It is line with what I want to say that there is no equality of boys and girls. When I talk of Murang’a I am talking of my community at large, the Kikuyu as a community. These are my personal views. When we compare ourselves with other cultures for example the Western, the girl child in the African sense is looked down upon (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

The viewpoint that “the girl child in the African society is looked down upon” remains largely unchallenged within the societies that carry it, and perpetuates the frames and constructions that girls use to draw from. The fact that they are in single-sex secondary schools does not seem protect them from perceiving themselves as merely female. When they perceive themselves as mere females the benefits of education or even the future as educated women, becomes a remote reality. Even where post-secondary education may be desired a school that reinforces the belief systems that belittle women or hold them in poor regard creates a negative experience about the value of being educated. This accentuates the notion that girls are ‘merely females’. Where such thinking takes root it is not unusual that girls opt to get married almost immediately after secondary school abandoning their dreams and aspirations for higher education and prestigious careers (see section 6.4.5.4 and 6.4.5.5). This is recounted below:

I have seen it by way of relating the two, trickling to education or the way they approach education. They just wait. The teacher after all is to provide, I lose nothing after all even if I do not achieve. I have seen other girls who have got very poor grades but they ended up being married. And again with corruption in Kenya I have seen girls with very low grades and they end up with very high offices (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

The case of Fort Hall is filled with contradictions. School is the place where dreams and aspirations are created rather than lost, and I found it particularly disturbing that marriage is considered an alternative to failed or unsuccessful educational pursuits.

### 6.5.6 SELF PERCEPTION IN AN UNYIELDING EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

I have mentioned in the previous chapters (see Chapter 2 section 2.2.3) that education in Kenya is examination oriented. Media attention on KCSE examination performance in public schools has mounted in recent years and created a yardstick with which to judge schools (East African Standard Team, 2001a and b). An appearance in the KCSE league tables is
suggestive of the ‘quality of education’ a school offers, it improves a school’s ‘academic value’. For schools that do not appear in these revered spaces the learning culture becomes questioned. This is the struggle that goes on in the minds of girls in Fort Hall where learning has to go on even when the school is invisible to the public:

By being here, I am not the same as when I came here. It has helped me. Academically I have improved and in other areas such as being responsible. I can manage my time and it has broadened my mind. The way I view things is not the same as if I could not have been here. (Lucy FIII, Fort Hall).

The view of the School Principal is that girls own perceptions’ impede their education and that is why the school lacks visibility in terms of academic performance. Questioning the learning culture in her own school, the School Principal is of the opinion that girls do not do enough. According to her “they [girls] are not looking beyond the four-year education. They do not know what they want after the four years. So most of them have no direction”. The lack of ambition is probably resistance to new initiatives that she has introduced. The girls possibly resign themselves to their fate because of how their own teachers perceive them. Like the girls, they too seem resistant to change. The following excerpt recounts the school principal’s experience of teacher resistance:

*Areka atia* [what is she doing?]. Does she think it will work? What does she think she is? She cannot change Fort Hall all of a sudden (School Principal, Fort Hall).

Given the social orientation of girls in Fort Hall and the academic pressure to measure up to the standards of the ‘academic leagues’, despondency is inevitable when constancy becomes unsustainable. The reality of what actually happens in Fort Hall hits home in the following excerpt:

All of a sudden [since becoming Deputy Principal] I am noticing things that I was not very keen on as a teacher especially on things to do with attitude – girls’ attitudes. All of a sudden it has hit me that we are wasting a lot of time. We are dragging. We are wasting a lot of time (emphasis). This is very preoccupying. It is the one constant thought I have. What are we going to do to change that attitude for the better? (Deputy Principal, Fort Hall).

The academic environment in Fort Hall is unyielding because it is harshly judged by the quality of examination results. This is particularly frustrating for teachers because poor results make teaching a fruitless exercise:

I feel so much of my energy is wasted. When I compare them with other schools that I have taught I actually feel that I do my best but I do not get the results. That is where the dissatisfaction comes from (Mrs I, teacher Fort Hall).
Even in the midst of these experiences, the girls in Fort Hall envisage gainful outcomes from their education. However, the extent to which single-sex schooling is able to provide such meaningful experiences and outcomes is only achieved in part because of institutional ordering, social and cultural factors. Why institutional ordering, social and cultural factors should be allied to single-sex institutions, is the big question.

6.5.7 MOTHERS AND FATHERS IN GIRLS’ EDUCATION

Parents have been identified as a critical force in their children’s education. A parent’s active participation in a child’s education corresponds to a student’s pursuit of challenging tasks, persistence and satisfaction with schoolwork. For girls, parental involvement is even more critical because of the significant education decisions that are made at this stage of their lives along with attendant adolescent developments. Parents are mentors and role models, and more so mothers in the case of girls’ education.

Schools like most institutions wield power. This power and authority determines the extent to which stakeholders become partners and participants in school decision-making processes. In Fort Hall parental partnerships and participation has interesting contradictions.

Although parents are reported to attend important school events like Open Days and consultative meetings with subject and/or class teachers, for most parents the contributions to these are minimal. Parental behaviour in this regard contradicts the 67.4% that are reported as dissatisfied with the academic performance of their daughters. One questions why they do nothing about it when the opportunity to do so is availed to them. Although there are those who show keenness, ask for details and even raise issues with comments on their daughters report books, these are few. For the majority it is a case of ‘wait and see’. Asked if parents voluntarily visit the school for the academic reasons, the School Principal stated: “they wait until you arrange for them to come”. Several teachers confirmed this apathetic attitude:

Very few parents consult us. It is only when we call the parents for meetings or for prize giving-days. Sometimes we are consulted as a by the way. Otherwise, there are some parents who are very keen. They keep on consulting physically or over the phone or by writing and we respond to their needs (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

We only have counted parents that will try and follow up what the problem their daughters have or something of the sort (Mrs N, teacher Fort Hall).

The only area that they participate well is when they bring their daughters for holiday coaching. All of them would like their daughters to be coached so that they pass well. But
other than that I may not know about their involvement in the school (Head of Technical Department, Fort Hall).

The parents of this school appear cooperative and willing to become involved in the on-goings in their daughters education. However, because Fort Hall is a boarding school there tends to be a demarcation of roles and with parents infrequent visits to the school and nature of consultations made – primarily inquiries on school fees, poor academic performance and severe indiscipline – parents eventually fade to the periphery. Parental ‘visibility’ becomes low especially in terms of contributions to important education decisions. This trend is not uncommon in Kenyan boarding schools because the perception is that ‘there is someone to take care of problems’. This unspoken and more important unchallenged understanding also contributes to making single-sex boarding schools attractive places to send children because they do not have to bear the responsibility of day to day decisions in their children’s education.

These perceptions do not augur well with the School Principal who views it as parental neglect of responsibility. The trend also indicates that parents are willing to take ownership of the school only for the period that their daughters are enrolled in it. Judging from the quality of parental involvement it is apparent that ownership does not correspond with their preference of Fort Hall as the school of choice. In fact the quality of involvement displays resistance to ownership and it is similar to that among a third of the daughters. As the School Principal observes the focus of interest on the school is school fees: “little else do they give to their girls’ education apart from school fees”. Still, it worth noting that even where decisions require financial support parents are not proactive:

The one year I have been here I have invited parents twice and I have not heard them telling me ‘mwalimu [teacher] can we have this’. It is usually from me and then the board of governors and then we ask the parents to give us money to have those projects and to improve our curriculum. But I have not heard it coming from the parents (School Principal, Fort Hall).

Finally, while parents do feel compelled to take bear financial responsibilities even among parents it is not shared equally.

6.5.7.1 His role and her role in their daughters education
The Deputy Principal from her experience observes that mothers are more actively involved in their daughters’ education. Fathers assume that their “job is to provide” but the “upbringing, the discipline, the guiding, the moulding they leave to the mothers. So that sometimes it appears as if they [fathers] are helpless. They do not know what to do”. Fathers
are therefore more distanced and often prefer to send mothers to deal with school matters and they even state so themselves. For mothers, having to deal with school matters often becomes an emotional experience.

Secondary education is expensive and for many families the challenge to keep children in school is immense. According to the Dean of Studies though the region is faced with economic problems, the school is aware and understands the kind of financial strain parents undergo. There are even payments arrangements to lessen parents’ stress, “parents make pledges and they honour those pledges.” However financial problems do accumulate and when they do, they affect girls. Such is the situation for students in FIII and FIV because by the third and fourth year of secondary school, there is the likelihood that other siblings join secondary school adding to the financial strain (see section 6.3 for family size). According to the Deputy Principal delayed payments are not uncommon in Fort Hall and neither is sending girls home for school fees. Poverty and financial strain affect parents and daughters and is a likely reason for the distanced involvement among fathers and the emotional behaviour of mothers (see section 6.5.6.2). These roles are also sanctioned by socio-cultural socialisation:

I think the fathers have relegated the responsibilities to the mothers. They think that it is the mother who is close to the daughter, the mother who is always with the daughter and maybe those problems there (in the school) can be solved by the mother and the daughter (School Principal, Fort Hall)

While modernistic changes in gender roles have seen increased participation of women in the labour market and the family set up among the Kikuyu community has changed as a result, this inherently patrilineal society men are the providers and that is why in this school the payment of school fees is seen as the fathers responsibility and adding to the daughter the mother’s role (see section 6.4.4.1). The involvement of fathers in their daughter’s education is therefore material. In the case of rural folk it is also more than likely that father’s work away from home creating an absent father who is far removed from the non-material needs of the family. It is for such reasons that mothers find themselves more involved in their daughters’ education. It is also under such circumstances that a teenage girl will complete four years of secondary education yet remain ‘unknown’ to the father. As the Deputy Principal points out, the consequences are depressing: “in the process of her growing up and now she is almost an adult he does not know where to start. He does not know this child [emphasis].” This social phenomenon explains why important education decisions on subject choices and careers appear riddled with contradictions. The better educated and presumably
more informed parent (father) is away fending for the family and therefore distanced from the progression in the daughters education while the other (mother) with the time is less educated but is forced to make decisions with or without quality information. As the Deputy Principal rightly observes, some of the problems that girls face in their education abound because they lack the involvement of both parents.

To expect one parent to manage even one child is expecting too much. Given that we are Africans nobody is content with one child, you have several so managing all of them is a problem (Deputy Principal, Fort Hall).

Although the majority of parents (89.7%) indicate that they were consulted on the choice of subjects it is unlikely that parents deliberated on the issue, and while their education cannot be levelled against them it obviously plays a critical role in what they were able to contribute and going by what has been discussed there is an absence of informed input from parents. A senior teacher in the school confirms this:

Most parents do not understand the education system of today. Their level of education is low. They underwent the previous education system so the 8-4-4 is strange to them. It is something that is external. For them it is the girl to decide (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

6.5.7.2 Parental involvement in girls education: Realities, consequences, implications

Slanted parental involvement compromises education decisions and the development of key social skills such as assertiveness, confidence and competitiveness. Even though single-sex schools are claimed to develop these traits they are often associated with the presence of a male model who should be the father but in this school is absent. Again, this development is downplayed because mothers in Fort Hall place their emphasis on good behaviour including humility, submissiveness, smartness and cleanliness. The other problem with the divided roles among parents is that it reinforces stereotypes. Using what they experience, girls progress through school anticipating finding someone who will look after them and in doing so fail to utilise the education opportunities availed to them.

Finally, the complexity of daughter/mother/father dynamics in modern Kenyan families is relayed through the experiences of the School Principal. Using her own personal experience to reflect on what happens in Fort Hall; she observes that even though her husband is comfortable with their daughters in the house once they go to school, he does not bother to know what is happening with them. It is not the nature of his job that prevents him from visiting their schools; rather it is a lack of interest and the belief that “it is a mother’s job to be
bothered by others.” These socio-cultural features that divide female and male roles are distinct in a family that considers itself well-educated, modern and flexible. How about those who are not well-educated, modern or flexible?

6.6 CONCLUSION

The objective of this chapter is to find out the education choices and aspirations among girls in Fort Hall Girls Secondary School. The following conclusions are drawn with respect to the four research questions. With respect to girls’ experiences of education in an all girls’ school, the following are the conclusions:

- Beyond the fact that girls are secured in their survival in secondary school, the privileges of single-sex education appear not to advantage the girls in this school. Although the girls enjoy being in the school, the school culture is hostile. Rather than cohesiveness, the girls have to navigate and develop the self identity and self-esteem required to enhance their education achievements in a school environment that is divisive because of overt social classification, nonchalant about gender stereotyping in girls education and wanting as far as parental involvement in girls’ education is concerned. The impact of these three things is found to have far-reaching consequences on the girls’ education output and outcomes particularly with respect to subject preferences and choices.

- Like all schools in Kenya, the meritocratic selection system makes examinations very important in education. In this school, the ultimate goal, for teachers especially, is to ensure that girls pass examinations. Examinations therefore feature a lot in girls’ experiences of schooling.

With respect to school subject choices and preferences the following are the conclusions:

- Though mathematics and science are core curriculum subjects, the majority of the girls show little interest in the subjects. In fact, given a choice, the girls in Fort Hall would not take Physics. Besides negative peer pressure and teacher attitudes towards, the history of performance in individual subjects, the negative perception that girls have towards mathematics in particular is linked to a poor foundation in primary school. The positive attitude towards Computer Studies is uniquely different considering what the girls in this school think of science and mathematics. The desire to learn foreign languages shows that the girls have interests in other subjects besides what is currently offered to them.
With respect to higher education aspirations the following are the conclusions:

- The girls in Fort Hall desire university education but many of them do not genuinely believe that they have the ability to secure admission into university. Besides the fact that the school has taken few girls to university, the girls also lack female role models to emulate. For those that perceive university education as unattainable, excuses and pragmatic reasons are offered for their preference of college education.

With respect to career aspirations the following are the conclusions:

- The girls’ career choices indicate that they lack career guidance. Once again there is evidence that there is little parental involvement in these decisions. The girls genuinely lack role models they can emulate and many choices are based on the status and prestige linked to certain career types. The career choices do not match the subject preference patterns either.
CHAPTER 7

A CASE STUDY OF DOMINICAN GIRLS’ SCHOOL

The self drive is what is very important and if one comes to school without that self drive no matter how much the teacher tries on that person you shall have to use more time to counsel her, guide her to see the essence of getting self motivation and that is what will drive her to have aspirations for higher things.
(School Principal, Dominican Girls Secondary School)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As I have already stated in the introduction in Chapter 5, this third case study chapter presents patterns and trends in girls’ education. It examines girls’ views of education, their choice and preferences of school subjects, careers and higher education. Like the chapters before it, both quantitative and qualitative data are presented in the discussion.

7.2 A PROFILE OF DOMINICAN GIRLS’ SCHOOL

7.2.1 THE INFRASTRUCTURE

Dominican Girls School is located in a rural Murang’a District some 20 km north of Murang’a town. Originally established as a mixed sex Harambee day school in the 1970s Dominican gradually phased out the boys to become a single-sex girls’ boarding school in 1990. Although the school maintains some Harambee school characteristics (see Mwiria, 1990), it is rapidly growing in terms of enrolment and is an upcoming district school in Murang’a District.

At the onset of this study in February 2002, there were 295 students enrolled in 8 classes: 70 in form FI, 73 in FII, 78 in FIII and 74 in FIV. The school had a total of 19 teaching staff, 11 male and 8 female. This classifies Dominican as a small school in terms of size. The advantage for students is small classes, rarely in excess of 40 students. The disadvantage, however, is that the size of the school determines the school curriculum and so Dominican does not offer a wide variety of subjects because of a low curriculum establishment (see Appendix L and N).

For its and Harambee school history, Dominican is well established in terms of physical facilities. The learning and teaching facilities include eight classrooms, one home science room and two science laboratories, both adequately equipped. The other facilities include a
small poorly equipped library cum bookstore with more newspapers than books. There is also a promising computer laboratory with six computers but no printer. All the buildings are permanent structures with connection to electricity, water and telephone and although the school is crammed there are plans to build a modern administration block.

The school lacks sporting facilities, it only has a netball pitch and has to share an adjacent sports field that belongs to the local primary school. The school farm is equally small and is primarily for use by agriculture students rather than income-generating activities. Dominican does not own any vehicles. All the same, except for lack of space, the facilities in Dominican are in good condition. There is also an indication that the school is developing its facilities, particularly science laboratories where there is investment in equipment.

Since Dominican is a boarding school it has two boarding houses a dining hall and school kitchen. There are nine teachers’ houses occupied by the school principal, her deputy, a few members of the teaching staff and non-teaching staff such as the school matron and cateress. The majority of the teaching staff is housed off the school campus.

Like most state owned schools in Kenya, Dominican is affiliated to a religious body. In this case it is the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. It also has a school board that includes both professional and non-professional. Among the educated professionals are a lawyer and a doctor. The others are semi professionals in farming and small business enterprises.

7.2.2 THE PEOPLE

Like I have said before teachers are known to ‘settle’ in a school and become a feature in the school creating its collective history and sustaining and passing on traditions.

Unlike Yellowwood and Fort Hall, Dominican has no old girls in its staff and none of the teaching staff are ‘settled’ in the school. In fact, there is no indication of a legacy with the teaching staff as is the case at Yellowwood (see section 5.2.2). This, as will be discussed in the next chapter, has to do with the origins of the school (see section 8.2.4).

The written questionnaire was distributed and completed by 14 out of 19. In terms of gender, eight were male and six female excluding the school principal who is female. The majority (64.2%) indicated that they were married but over a third (35.7%) indicated unmarried.

In terms of age and in comparison with Yellowwood (see 5.2.2) and Fort Hall (see 6.2.2), the staff in Dominican are relatively young. They range between 26-40 years with 57.1%, the majority, in the 26-30 age range bracket, 28.5% between 31-35 years and 14.2% 36-40 years. This rather youthful age range is also reflected in the cumulative teaching experience. The
majority (64.2%) has between 3-6 years of teaching experience while 35.8% between 7-14 years. The highest number of teaching years is 14 years, which is also the lowest among the three case studies (see sections 5.2.2 and 6.2.2).

With respect to academic qualifications the teachers are well qualified to teach as 35.7% have diplomas in education while 42.8% have bachelor’s degrees. A small 14.2% hold a postgraduate diploma in education (PGDE) while 7.1% hold a non-teaching qualification. Unlike the teachers in Yellowwood and Fort Hall, a significant number from Dominican are pursuing further studies: master’s degree (14.2%) and other courses (35.7%). Some of the courses are not education based even though they may have educational benefits for instance guidance and counselling and computer studies. The pursuit of studies that are not educationally inclined alludes to the unsettledness among the majority of teachers in this school.

The retention rate of teachers in Dominican can be described as relatively good because the majority (92.8%) have remained in the school for between 1-6 years. However, half (50%) has taught at the school for only one to two years.

The few years of teaching experience here can be attributed to the choice of teaching as a career and the satisfaction derived from being part of this school. Although for the majority (64.2%) of teachers teaching is a career of choice, nearly half (42.8%) of the same teachers desire to leave teaching should another career opportunity be found and career change is uncertain for another 42.8%. The majority (85.6%) of teachers in Dominican are not settled about teaching as a career. This helps to explain why the school does not have many teachers with a long teaching experience even though the majority (71.2%) reported that they derived satisfaction from teaching in the school. There was also a consensus that the remuneration was poor and not a motivation at all.

For the teachers at Dominican teaching is set in a paradox. One the one hand it is the career of choice but on the other there is the desire to leave. The pursuit of further studies that are not education related indicates some ambivalence towards teaching. Ambivalence is not restricted to the teachers alone, i is also reflected in the students’ choice of school (see section 7.3.3.1).

7.3 PROFILES WITHIN GIRLS’ EDUCATION

As I have explained in Chapter 5 (see section 5.3), the purpose of the written questionnaire obtained an overview from which important profiles of girls’ education were drawn. As stated in the preceding case study chapters the features discussed under these profiles are:

- Age and home and family background in order to establish the kinds of families they come from and their previous education background. This information is important because it is linked in particular to academic achievement and career aspirations.
- Education in the family in order to establish who receives what kind of education.
- Girls’ education profile in order to establish what level of education and career opportunities they aspire towards, as well as their attitudes towards school.
• Subject preference patterns in order to establish the school subjects they like, dislike and consider important as well as the subjects they desire to have offered in their schools.

7.3.1 THE FAMILY PROFILE

This section describes the girls by age, home background, primary education, family type and level of education attainment within families. The purpose is to provide detailed family background so that girls’ educational perceptions, choices and preferences are situated within a familial context.

The FIII and FIV girls at Dominican fall in the 15-19 year range the mean age is 17.2. The majority (75%) are aged between 17 and 18 years. However slightly more than a third (38.1%) are aged 18 and 19 years which suggests that Dominican has girls who are slightly older than their form (see Chapter 5 section 5.3.1 to compare). This kind of variation between schools is not unusual and in fact it is attributable to the individual schooling history and in particular to the repetition of grades in primary school, which is a common feature in Kenyan education. Given that the girls in this school are admitted with comparatively low academic grades, there is the possibility that girls admitted to this school are older than their grade because of repeating grades in upper primary. They repeat in order to secure better marks in the primary leaving examination (KCPE). Nevertheless, even though the percentage of girls aged between 18 and 19 in Dominican is a prominent 38.1%, it is not unique to this school. A similar pattern is evident in Fort Hall at 29.9% (see Chapter 7 section 7.3.1) and Yellowwood at a lower 17.2% (see Chapter 6 section 5.3.1). This evidence suggests that there is a significant percentage of girls in all three schools, and in Dominican in particular, who have repeated classes or else started their primary education late. The former is the more probable reason given the rural context of all three schools.

The data show that 71.8% of these girls come from ‘rural’ homes or homes situated in a rural area. A small 16.7% come from ‘small towns’ while 6.4% and 5.1% come from ‘big towns’ and the ‘city’ respectively. The ‘old age phenomenon’ can be linked to primary education in rural areas where delays from one grade to another are not uncommon and often enforced by the lack of school fees, poor academic performance, prolonged illness or illness in the home (Chapter 3 section 3.4.2). The majority is from rural Murang’a and it is likely that the delay begins in primary school. The data below confirms this likelihood.
Other data reveal that 89.7% of the girls received their primary education in schools located in rural areas or small towns with the majority (83.1%) attending government day schools. This is the highest percentage among the three case studies. Only 6.5% attended government boarding school for primary education and only 7.8% and 2.6% received their education in private boarding and day school respectively which compared to Yellowwood and Dominican is low. This evidence reveals something about the social class represented here. Among the three schools Dominican is at the lower end of a Kenya’s besieged lower middle class. At the same time the evidence reinforces the fact that Dominican, though an upcoming girls' school, still provides for the educational needs of girls who are born and bred in the surrounding rural area. In other words, even though Dominican may not be defined as such anymore it is fundamentally a ‘Harambee school’.

Family profiles reveal patterns about social structures, social norms and values. The parental profile at Dominican shows that the majority of the girls in FIII and FIV are from two parent families. The majority of mothers (75.5%) and fathers (80%) are married. Single mothers account for 11.7% and single fathers a low 2% of the parents, widows and widowers 3.8% and 2% respectively. Mothers account for 1.9% of divorced and separated parents but there are no fathers in these categories. This marital status profile suggests that the girls in Dominican come from ‘two parent’ homes, the kind of homes that are conducive to fostering the educational achievement of daughters.

In addition to ‘proper families’, the statistics further indicate that the parents are relatively young. The majority (73.6%) of mothers are in the 36-45 bracket. However, 7.6% are in the 56-60 bracket which is for mothers a relatively advanced age, biologically, for them to be having teenage children. For fathers the majority (64.7%) are in the 41-50 bracket, about a fifth (19.8%) are in the 56 - 60 bracket which for men has no biological significance to having teenage children. Like Yellowwood and Fort Hall, Dominican also has mothers and fathers in the 31 - 35 age bracket which is a relatively young age for mothers to have teenage daughters (see section 5.3.1 and section 6.3.1). As mentioned before the girls in this school are older than their grade age, which in addition to the relatively young mothers and fathers, reflects on the parenting history. It is possible that in this school the parents in the 31-35 age bracket were mothers and fathers in their teenage years. The large family size also confirms this.
The data indicates that although the average family size is of 4.5 (four) children the number of children per family ranges from one to nine. Most families are in the middle 17.1% with three, 23.7% with four and 23.7% with five. Few families have only one child (3.9%) or as many as nine (3.9%). Clearly, family size is not small in Dominican and a large proportion of these families also indicated having children in secondary school. At least 83.6% of the parents indicated having between one and two children in secondary school while 9.1% had three and 3.6% four. Families with more than one child in secondary school as seen in Yellowwood and Fort Hall is not uncommon (see 5.3.1 and 6.3.1). There is an important correlation between family size and education. Literature on gender and education in developing countries decries that the quality of female education is linked to the number and gender of children in a family (see Chapter 3 section 3.3).

Out of the 54 parents who responded to the question inquiring about the cost of educating their daughter in Dominican, 20.4% indicated that they spend Ksh 20,000 (US$ 286) per year but the majority (55.6%) indicated Ksh 30,000 (US$ 430). A small 9.3% spend Ksh 40,000 (US$ 573) and 5.6% Ksh 50,000 (US$ 716) and another 9.3% over Ksh 50,000 (US$ 716). The differences in figures indicate that the actual cost of educating a girl goes far beyond the actual figures cited by the school and while spending patterns may cluster around the figure that is set by the Ministry of Education for public secondary schools it is evident that some parents spend more meaning that spending can differ within the same school, pointing to differences in social class. Single-sex education can become quite expensive as cost varies from one family to another. Such costs are sometimes unnecessary as they come from the pressure to conform, which is common among girls in boarding schools:

The other day I had a case of girl who came late. She was sent back home then she went to the mother and for the three days that she was at home she was sleeping outside the house simply because she thought the mother was annoyed and she did not want to talk to the mother. She was very annoyed so for three days she did not sleep in the house so the mother came here asking me what she should do about the girl. I talked to the girl and finally she said that the mother does not give her enough pocket money and the mother does not buy her powder and lotion ... I told the mother ... 'if the lotion and the powder is the issue then you buy her ... it is just Ksh 150 (US$2) (Deputy School Principal, Dominican).'

Employment, or the lack of it, has a direct impact on a parent’s ability to manage the cost of educating children. The majority of parents in Dominican indicated that they were in the 'self-employed' and 'unemployed' categories. According to the data, mothers and fathers employed in the public sector account for 17.0% and 47.1% respectively and in the private
sector 9.4% and 5.9%. In the self-employed category mothers account for 43.4% and fathers 25.5%. The environs of Dominican are rural and so for many of the parents’ self-employment means working within the predominant tea and coffee growing farming and small business sectors. In other words, most of these parents are more than likely to be small-scale subsistence farmers and business people with retail shops and other small-scale enterprises that sustain rural economies.

For parents who are unemployed or without a reliable source of income, school fees are prohibitive. In fact, it is as prohibitive even for parents that draw an income from subsistence and/or cash crop farming. This is because the slumped national economy adds to financial woes and with the majority of families having more than one child in secondary school the cost of secondary education is very high.

In category of the unemployed, the majority are mothers (24.5%) and the minority fathers (5.9%). The unemployment of one parent in the home is significant because it affects the family’s ability to manage the cost of education. This fact is even more important in the light of the fact that the cost of education is prohibitive where families have more than one child in secondary school and in consideration of the fact that it is girl children who are relegated where a choice between children has to be made. Second, it is also important to note that the unemployment of a mother is somewhat detrimental to a daughters’ perception of women’s role in the workplace. Where a large number of women are consciously left out of the job market, as is the case with a sizeable percentage of mothers in this school, there is likely to be some impact on the educational perceptions that the daughters have of the educational achievement of women.

7.3.2 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROFILES IN THE FAMILY

As already mentioned in the earlier case study chapters, the education of parents and siblings is significant in the context of girls’ education (see 5.3.2). The example of the mother is especially important to how girls translate their own education because in this particular case the mothers generally have a low level of educational attainment.

Among siblings, there is a slightly higher percentage of sisters (33.8%) with a college education than of brothers (30.8%). However, for university level education brothers show a
higher percentage than sisters at 10.3% and 5.2% respectively. The pattern is the same in Yellowwood (see section 5.3.2) and Fort Hall (see section 6.3.2). The pattern reflects on the male/female dichotomy in higher education in Kenya (see Chapter 2 section 2.2.3).

While correlations have been made between female access to education and mothers level of education (see Chapter 2 section 2.2.3), it is emerging in this last chapter of the case studies that the beyond access, a mothers own education has impact on her daughter’s education in terms of involvement, perceptions about education and educational aspirations.

The following is the education profile for parents with no schooling: mothers 1.3% and fathers 0.0%. For primary level education mothers are 20.8% and fathers 10.4%. For secondary level education mothers 39.0% and fathers 29.9%. For college education mothers stand at 29.9% and fathers 33.8%. For university level education, mothers constitute only 2.6% and fathers 9.1%. While it is evident that both mothers (61.1%) and for fathers (40.3%) have a secondary level education and below, it is notable that the pattern of educational attainment among mothers is similar to that found in Yellowwood and Fort Hall (see section 5.3.1.3 and 6.3.2). In all three cases it is low. Considering that mothers are role models and examples, the level of education that a mother has attained becomes significant in terms of the choices girls make.

While it is not the objective of this study to explain why the level of education is low among mothers, it is of interest that the majority are in the 36-45 age bracket which means that they undertook their primary, secondary, and tertiary education between the mid-sixties and mid-eighties. They were educated at a time of rapid expansion in education, which therefore raises questions with regard to the level of attainment seen here (see Chapter 2 section 2.2.3). Given that there were opportunities for education the reason for this pattern can only be explained by a more in-depth analysis of the structure and framing of Kenyan education because low female educational attainment among mothers is the trend in the three schools. Though social, economic and cultural factors come easily to mind it is important to consider that macro level political and economic factors have affected education since independence.

The collective education level of educational attainment in a home is of significant importance to the education of girls. For instance, the preference of a college level education by the majority of girls in this school (see section 7.3.3.2) can be linked to among other
things, the level of education attained by their parents and siblings. Both sisters (33.8%) and brothers (30.8%) show inclination towards college level education.

With regard to parents professions, data showed that parent’s engage in 26 different professions and siblings 31. In this school mothers are active in 8 and fathers 13. Teaching with 14.1% is the leading profession among those that parents engage in and it is also the leading one for mothers. The other professions where mothers are found are nursing 2.6%, medicine 1.3%, business 2.6% and farming (2.6%). The pattern is similar for fathers, teaching leads with 18.8%, followed by business 3.9%, farming 3.3%, mechanics and engineering 3.9%, armed forces 3.9%, medicine 2.6%, sales and marketing 2.6%, and finance and accounting 2.6%. The percentage of parents in professional employment is low in Dominican and while this can be expected given the level of education among parents, it is important to point out that an anomaly occurred in the distribution of the questionnaire.

In this particular school, the teacher given the responsibility of distributing and assisting students with the completion of the questionnaire explained to them, when asked, that the word ‘profession’ describes work for which some training has been undertaken. This explanation can be attributed to the 73.1% of mothers and 55.8% of fathers indicated as having no profession. On the other hand, with the low level of education evident among these parents it is possible that many of them do not actually have a profession even though they may have secured jobs. The other explanation which has already been given for Yellowwood and Fort Hall might be that the girls did not understand the question even after it was explained to them or else found it difficult to articulate what their parents do in terms of the question ‘What profession is your mother/father in?’ (see Chapter 4 section 4.3.2 and Chapter 5 section 5.3.2). All the same, the low level of education appears the more convincing argument.

For siblings, with the exception of teaching, which accounts for the professions of 4.0% of sisters and 2.7% of brothers, the other professions are a negligible percentage. Nursing accounts for 4.0% of sisters, and accounting 2.7% of brothers. A large percentage of sisters (82.7%) and brothers (84.0%) are without a profession, it is more than likely that these ones are still pursuing their primary and secondary education.
Like Yellowwood and Fort Hall the trend in Dominican confirms that teaching and nursing are professions of rural folk. Teaching and nursing are among the few professional types of employment available both in rural and urban areas. It is also worth noting that teaching is the leading profession among siblings. The trend also suggests that there might be the power of parental influence on career choice or else a preference for teaching (and this is very likely in Kenya) because of a lack of other options, limited career choice and competitiveness at the tertiary level and in the job market.

7.3.2.1 Role models in girls education
Role models impact on girls’ education variously. The vast majority (95.9%) indicated that they had role models the majority (61.3%) of whom include significant others namely mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. Others are personalities from the entertainment industry and reknowned figures, members of staff in the school (12.0%), fellow students (18.7%) and the school principal (4.0%). Female role models are admired because of attributes like independence and self-reliance.

In addition to family figures, it is important to note that in Dominican girls have role models from the student body (compare with section 5.3.1.4 and section 6.3.2). In the absence of outstanding significant others, girls will seek role models from among themselves to satisfy the desire for someone to emulate or look up to.

7.3.3 A PROFILE OF GIRLS’ EDUCATION CHOICES
This section describes four features of girls’ education, namely choice of school, educational aspirations, subject preferences and choices, and career aspirations.

7.3.3.1 Dominican: My school but another’s choice
For 66.7% of girls enrolled in FIII and FIV, Dominican Girls School is not the school of choice. It is the school of choice for a third (33.3%). For the majority low performance in the primary leaving examination (KCPE) was cited as a reason for joining Dominican. Other reasons include good academic performance and discipline which was advice offered by former primary school teachers, parents and relatives, and low school fees. The situation is similar in Fort Hall (see section 6.4.1) but different in Yellowwood (see section 5.3.2.1).

While the choice of a secondary school is fairly unrestricted, the history that goes with the development of education in Kenya (see section 2.2.3) and the increasingly competitive
education system based on examination merit has served to brand schools (see section 8.2.4). Schools like Dominican are not dreams schools that attract competitive students, they simply open doors to those that have been left out of the likes of Yellowwood. There are implications to this, as schooling experiences are different when a school is not perceived in a positive light.

For many Kenyan parents academic performance leads among the factors motivating the choice of a secondary school (see section 5.4.2). Positive perceptions about a school reinforce acceptance or non-acceptance. For 85.2% of the parents, Dominican is perceived as a suitable school. The parents believe that it is able to offer educational opportunities that are better than what they had when they were in secondary school. In this case parents’ preferences are influenced by their own schooling experiences. Analysis of the kinds of secondary schools parents attended show high attendance in single-sex and mixed sex district and Harambee schools. The data shows that none (0%) of the mothers attended a national secondary school as compared to 15.7% of the fathers. 50.0% attended single sex schools and 23.1% mixed sex schools. Reasons like “she performs well than I used to when I was in secondary school” explain why a mother’s own schooling experience becomes sufficient reason to believe in Dominican. The fact that 61.5% of mothers were in boarding schools is another reason as well as good facilities and resources, the introduction of computer studies and discipline.

I have already mentioned that boarding school education is generally expensive (see section 5.3.1.2 and 6.3.1). In this school fees are paid by primarily by fathers (61.5%). Other parties that do so are mothers (21.8%), guardians (7.7%), combined team of father and mother (5.1%), brothers and sisters (2.6%) and relatives (1.3%). Fathers play an important role in the financing of the daughter’s education, which means to say that they probably also have the upper hand in educational decisions, particularly those with financial implications. An example is that of choice of secondary school as discussed above and tertiary education (see 7.3.3.4.2)

7.3.3.1.1 Experiencing education in Dominican: The school of last resort

School activities, both academic and non-academic, variously contribute to girls’ education and schooling experiences. In this study, the level of engagement and the satisfaction derived
shows their importance. These experiences are even more important when consideration is taken of the fact that the majority of girls in Dominican did not choose to be in this school.

Academic studies were found to be “very enjoyable” (75.7%), “quite enjoyable” (10.8%), “enjoyable” (12.2%), “quite boring” (1.4%) but not “very boring” (0.0%). Though Dominican is not the school of choice of close to two-thirds of the girls enrolled there, the majority of the girls have a positive experience of academic studies. Academic studies go hand in hand with prep, which in Dominican is “very enjoyable” (46.7%), “quite enjoyable” (26.7%), “enjoyable” (21.3%), “quite boring” (1.3%), or “very boring” (4.0%). Although it is early to state judge, this positive experience of academic study, which is classroom learning and prep, confirms that the majority of the girls hold positive perceptions about their academic studies. The girls can be described as settled and positive about learning even though there is a small minority (5.3%) that find prep a boring academic activity.

Career guidance is an important academic-related activity. In boarding schools, career guidance is particularly important because of the absence of parents. To a great extent the students’ education choices are shaped by the quality of guidance they receive. In this school, the girls found it “very enjoyable” (59.5%), “quite enjoyable” (17.6%) and “enjoyable” (18.9%). A small percentage found it “quite boring” (2.7%) and even “very boring” (1.4%).

For games and sports the following were the girls’ experiences: “very enjoyable” (49.3%), “quite enjoyable” (30.1%), “enjoyable” (16.4%), “quite boring” (2.7%) and “very boring” (1.4%).

For clubs and societies it was: “very enjoyable” (64.7%), “quite enjoyable” (22.1%), “enjoyable” (13.2%), “quite boring” (0.0%) and “very boring” (0.0%).

For music and drama, both important co-curricular activities in the secondary school calendar, for the majority the experience was “very enjoyable” (71.6%) and therefore a positive perception. For some it was “quite boring” (2.7%) but there was no show of music and drama as downright boring activities.

There was little indication that the majority found Science Congress an overwhelmingly enjoyable experience even though it is an important activity on the school calendar. While it
is difficult to say if participation in science congress has any significant influence on science education, there is a varied level of enjoyment derived from “very enjoyable” (45.8%), “quite enjoyable” (22.2%), “enjoyable” (22.2%), “quite boring” (5.6%), to “very boring” (4.2%).

Clearly, Dominican is the only one of the three schools where clubs and societies are fully enjoyed by all the FIII and FIV students. Once again for a school that was not the choice of many girls this is a positive attribute and indication of a positive school ethos. The attitude to games and sports is particularly compelling given the fact that the school has limited resources (see 7.2.1 above) or anything close to the quality of sporting resources that Yellowwood has (see 5.2.1). While self-motivation might be the reason for the positive attitude, one questions whether that alone can sustain such positive perceptions particularly because the girls never wanted to be in school in the first place. All the same, given that this is a boarding school where a lot of time is spent in school, then the school ethos must be taken into account. In this case, there does appear to be a strong ethos that at the very least causes girls to accept and become ‘settled’ in a school that was not of their choice. The reason for this has a lot to do with the key players in the school (see 7.3.3.1.2).

7.3.3.1.2 Change makers: The key players inside Dominican

Although the perceptions of school activities individually made, the ethos that reigns within a school is critical in the establishment of a conducive atmosphere for academic and non-academic participation and development. The support and attention of key players, namely the school principal, teachers and students, determines schooling experiences including how one views education. This is especially true of boarding schools where there is a common identity and common goals established by the school.

The kinds of experiences that girls have while in school affect their education perceptions and even go as far as affecting their academic performance and the choices they have to make while they are in school, such as subject choice. The extent to which girls receive support and how they view these key players in their school life is therefore important to explore because besides the common school identity, there is familial-like support because of the boarding school status. All of this plays a very significant role in the lives of adolescent girls.

The majority (79.2%) of girls in this school indicated that the school principal was “very supportive”. Others found her “quite supportive” (13.9%) and “supportive” (6.9%).
was no indication at all of her being a “hardly supportive” or “not supportive” principal. Among the three, Dominican is the only school where the principal is entirely perceived in positive terms as far as student perceptions of her support is concerned. Even though Dominican was not the school of choice for the majority of girls enrolled there, there is indication that girls have no problems with the leadership of the school even though they may not be entirely settled.

While some teachers do not take on any role outside teaching others take on multiple roles in order to facilitate proper and effective functioning of various school activities. For teachers working in boarding schools the range of duties includes academic-related positions like head of department, subject head and class teacher to social and sporting positions like house master/mistress, sports coach and club/society patron and extends to include parenting, mentoring and counselling.

Unlike subject teachers’ class teachers are charged with extra responsibilities that require them to work closely with girls. In this school their support showed them to be “very supportive” (67.6%), “quite supportive” (24.8%) and “supportive” (5.4%). Only 1.4 and 1.4% indicated that the class teachers were “hardly supportive” and “not supportive” respectively.

Club patrons on the other hand are generally a supportive bunch. They vary from “very supportive” (67.1%) to “quite supportive” (21.4%) and “supportive” (11.4%). The support however goes down with the sports/games coaches who are shown to be “very supportive” (44.9%) “quite supportive” (29.0%) “supportive” (21.4%), “hardly supportive” (5.8%) and “not supportive” (1.4%). The support that comes with each role is important, but there are many arguments forwarded in the literature on role and influence of a teacher’s gender on girls’ education (see Chapter 3 section 3.5).

The questionnaire surveyed the ways in which girls perceive the support provided by teachers by gender. It was found that male teachers are generally inclined to be more supportive than their female colleagues. Between them for “very supportive” teachers male teachers were at 62.9% and female at 67.6%. For “quite supportive” 22.9% for male and 18.3% for female. For “supportive” males scored 14.3% and females 11.3%, a relatively close range. Unlike
their male counterparts, female teachers were shown to be “hardly supportive” (2.8%). Neither group was shown to be “not supportive”.

Since boarding schools confine students to a designated routine for up to 34 weeks in a year, this large body of students invariably has to organise and structure itself in certain ways in order to co-exist. The student body is itself a community and support or (lack of it) is derived from within it. As a community, students take on different roles and positions and this is important because it points to value and significance attached to different members of the student community. The data shows that students’ perceptions of their colleagues depend on the role they take and the perceptions they have of that role in relation to their well-being within the community. Close interactions appear to influence how support is perceived.

There are regular and even close interactions with classmates and in Dominican for more than half the girls classmates were shown to be “very supportive” (58.6%), a more favourable perception as compared to the support from prefects (43.7%) or from other students (46.6%). These two groups are often distanced members of the school community, particularly as far as regular everyday interactions are concerned.

Interestingly the support given by prefects, classmates and other students is very close. For “quite supportive” the percentage rating is as follows: prefects 28.2%, classmates 28.6% and other students 26.0%. Under “supportive” it is still close for prefects (19.7%) and other students (17.8%) but 8.6% for classmates because their support already is highly rated. For “hardly supportive” and “not supportive”, it is 2.8% and 5.6% for prefects and 6.8% and 2.7% for other students respectively. With the ratings at 2.9% for “hardly supportive” and 1.4% for “not supportive” it is evident that few classmates are perceived as being unsupportive in Dominican.

While the support is strongest between classmates there is a high level of support among students, which can be attributed to the small student population at Dominican. The findings are that prefects, classmates and other students are closely supportive rather than unsupportive.

With only 295 students supportive relationships can be established and sustained outside ones immediate class, which is more than likely what happens in this school. Clearly, the support
dynamics in Dominican are different from those in Yellowwood and Fort Hall (see sections 5.3.2.3 and 6.4.1.2). Here the dual and sometimes conflicting role of prefects do not appear to harm the perceptions students have of their support. In conclusion, Dominican appears to be a close-knit school with good support structures between the various stakeholders.

7.3.3.2 Educational aspirations
Dominican is a school with girls who want to pursue higher education but not necessarily university education. Data shows that even though the large majority (68.9%) aspires to pursue university level education, there is a significant percentage (29.7%) that only wants college level education and 1.4% that is satisfied to have only a secondary level education. These reasons for these choices are explained by the answers to the open question posed to teachers, “what are your experiences of teaching girls?” In their responses, they describe the girls as “good” and “well disciplined”, however they identify that “low academic ability” makes the “girls lose hope very easily” and “are highly demotivated and lack the drive and aspirations for higher things”. The girls in this school project a poor self-image to their teachers. According to the mathematics and Physics teachers girls “generally have difficulties learning mathematics”, “most of them [girls] believe that the subjects are hard and more masculine” and for one of the geography teachers, also trained to teach economics “they believe they are not capable as men”. For these teachers girls are simply not good enough in academics compared with boys. This image explains why the teachers perceive the girls as “not serious with education”. For teachers there is somewhat of a contradiction because there is the benefit of good discipline on the one hand but on the other, “there is no meaningful/seriousness in academics”.

For the girls in Dominican academic study appears a real challenge and so it is hardly surprising that only two thirds of the girls have aspiration for university education. However, it is important to consider that unlike Yellowwood, there is no legacy of university admission in this school. On average about 70 girls sit for KCSE every year. This gives the school a total of 700 girls between 1990/1991, the year the first batch of 8-4-4 students were admitted, and 2000/2001, the intake at the time the study was conducted (see Appendix T). However, given that only one girl (0.14%) has been admitted to university from Dominican, the absence of predecessors means that the girls in this school aspire for university education but never quite achieve it because they have no examples to draw from.
As mentioned in Chapter 3 the attainment of a high level of education is critical to women’s lives especially their social and economic well-being and while I question the extent to which the current education system is “more inclusive”, especially for girls, low female representation is a reality in girls’ education. One would want to argue that the probe lies in their rural background but the girls in Yellowwood come from a similar background and being rural does not appear to be a problem there. Given that the girls in this school join secondary school with relatively lower grades than say those in Yellowwood then their academic ability when intersected by a poor socialisation at home and in particular the absence of strong female role models explains why girls would project a poor self image. They may be receiving a good education in a single-sex school but they lack scaffolding from significant quarters like the home. This lack invariably shapes girls educational choices and aspirations.

The discussion hints at the numerous cultural and social factors that have become barriers to quality participation and girls’ attainment in education already outlined in Chapter 3. The question then is not what they are but rather why they would penetrate a seemingly protected single-sex schooling environment and how this impacts education choices and aspirations.

7.3.3.3 Subject choices and preferences
Dominican offers twelve subjects in FI and FII (see Appendix N). Among these, ten are compulsory and two are electives. Once students get to FIII the compulsory subjects are reduced to five while the electives rise to seven. The electives are intended to give students a choice from which they can combine subjects that match their academic abilities, preferences and career aspirations. Table 7.1 shows the subjects taken in FIII and FIV in Dominican. The students take eight subjects each, all of which are examinable in KCSE.

It is important to note that because of its size, Dominican has low enrolment and so it does not offer a wide variety of subjects to cater for the different abilities and talents of its students as compared to a large school like Yellowwood (see Appendix L for subject distribution, Appendix N for what is available in the three schools and Appendix M for is available nationally). Dominican is obviously less disadvantaged and there are far-reaching implications on girls’ career futures.
Subject choice decisions can be a simple or lengthy process depending on what information is available. As mentioned in the preceding case study chapters, informed choices depend on the quality of guidance and support from home and school. Once subject choices are made, the decisions are permanent because what follows is that students register with the Kenyan National Examination Council (KNEC) as candidates for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Subject choices have implications on higher education and careers and it is for this reason that most schools ask students to consult their parents and work together in arriving at decisions. Dominican is one such school that involves parents but the home front is weak as far as assisting students in this area is concerned. Given that the majority of mothers have only a secondary level education (see 7.3.2) one has to question how equipped they are to supply the right information and to guide their daughters through subject choice decisions.

Close to two-thirds (64.8%) of the parents indicated that they were dissatisfied with their daughters’ performance while a third (33.3%) expressed satisfaction. Added to the 78.8% who think the school has “a good variety of subjects” and the 21.2% who think otherwise, one does see parental awareness of what goes on in this school. But still the question is what kind of information do parents in this school base their decisions on when it comes to critical issues of subject choice? How informed are mothers, for example, on current trends in education and the job market, how able are they to help their daughters?

The majority of parents (90.2%) indicated that their daughters consulted them on the subject elective decisions but 9.8% did not. Dominican demands written consent on this matter,
which shows the seriousness, with which it takes parental involvement. All the same, such requirement do not necessarily result parents making meaningful contribution as is discussed later in the chapter (see 7.5.3). For now, below Table 7.2, shows subjects preference patterns among the FIII and FIV students.

According to Table 7.2 below, English, Kiswahili, Mathematics, Chemistry and Biology are the five compulsory subjects in FIII and FIV subjects at Dominican. Physics, Geography, History, Christian Religious Education, Agriculture, Commerce and Home Science are the seven electives.

The data shows that the leading three “favourite” subjects with over 10% rating are Biology (32.0%), English (16.0%) and Home Science (10.7%). The “worst” are Physics (29.3%), Mathematics (9.3%) and History (9.3%). Interestingly, Computer Studies at the time of this study was not yet on the formal school curriculum yet the data shows that there were negative perceptions from the introductory course offered to all forms in the school. The perceptions towards Physics and Mathematics show a pattern that fits with the literature negative female attitudes to science subjects (see section 3.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject preference</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Kiswahili</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Biology</th>
<th>Physics</th>
<th>Chemistry</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>CRE</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Home Science</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Computer Studies</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favourite</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even so, it is useful to examine these preference patterns in depth by comparing what is regarded as “important” to “worst” and “favourite”. For subjects rated as “worst” there is no way of telling whether or not the subject is still studied in FIII and FIV. A case in point is Physics and mathematics. The latter is a compulsory subject so the ratings are accurate, however for Physics only 22 students rated it and given that only 34 students out of 152 students in FIII and FIV take Physics (see Appendix N), I question how two-thirds of the Physics class in both forms would be so negative to a subject that is an elective, that is they did not have to take it. A more likely explanation for this rating is that once girls drop a subject at the end of FII, particularly one that they did not enjoy, the experiences are carried forward. This does not invalidate the findings rather it serves to show how strongly students feel about a subject. Since the reverse is not the case for “favourite subjects” the unfavourable perceptions demonstrate how deeply entrenched negative attitudes towards a subject can get. It is also an indication that while perceptions towards subjects might be individual they are also peer-driven.

It is important to note that there are girls that have no subject preference. All the girls show preference for certain subjects but 7.9% have no subject they consider as their “worst” while 17.6% do not have a subject they consider as “important”.

It is also important to note that while mathematics is among the leading hated subjects it tops among “important” subjects (24.3%). The fact that it is the “favourite” subject for 8.0% – a reasonable percentage taking into account that this is a compulsory subject – shows mixed attitudes. However, the comparatively high percentage for “important” subject suggests that the girls understand the importance of mathematics in developing numeric literacy and analytical thinking.

Biology on the other hand is different from Physics and Mathematics. It is a “favourite” (32.0%) and an “important” (20.3%) subject by a significant percentage and only a very small percentage (1.3%) hate the subject. Judging from the ratings for Chemistry, another favoured science subject in this school, it is evident that girls know the importance of science subjects. The enjoyment derived from participating in activities like Science Congress confirms this further but beyond this positive acknowledgment there is little else because the negative attitudes pervade.
Other interesting findings emerge from the subjects History, Home Science and Christian Religious Education. History is both the “favourite” and “worst” subject for 9.3% of the students and a subject that is considered “important” by a similar percentage (8.1%).

Seventy girls study Home Science, which is comparatively large number as compared to the Yellowwood and Fort Hall (see Appendix N). It is “favourite” subject for 10.7%, “important” for 2.7% and “worst” for 4.0%. The rating is the same rating for Chemistry and is somewhat of an irony considering that Home Science is a ‘normal’ subject for girls (see Appendix M and O and P to compare by gender subject enrolment nationally and in Murang’a district). It is important to note that it is more disliked than, Biology a science subject, Christian Religious Education (CRE), Kiswahili, English subjects that girls are supposedly naturally inclined to and even Agriculture which is familiar given the rural background f the girls.

Christian Religious Education also another subject linked with girls is not particularly favoured in this school. Only 6.7% consider it a “favourite” subject and 4.1% as “important”. Like Home Science, CRE is no longer a ‘girl subject’.

Few girls consider Kiswahili their “worst” subject (1.3%) and none (0.0%) an “important” subject. However, from my observations, Kiswahili and derivatives like sheng 13 are widely used in Dominican. With English as the medium of instruction it is not difficult to explain why it is considered an “important” subject by 9.5% or even why no one considers it their worst subject. However, given the preference for Kiswahili over English in social interactions it is difficult to explain why English is the “favourite” subject for 16.0% as compared to 2.7% for Kiswahili.

Like Yellowwood, Computer Studies in Dominican is a new subject that girls are being orientated to. Though it is yet to become an elective in FIII and FIV preference patterns show that it is a hated subject. The girls in this school do not consider it a favourite subject or even an important subject.

13 Sheng is a contemporary language that is a mixture English, Kiswahili and local vernaculars. It originated in urban areas, in particular Nairobi but it is now widespread in rural Kenya.
In 2002 schools could access 31 different subjects in accordance with the national secondary school curriculum guidelines (see Appendix L). In practice, few schools can offer all the subjects and so students often wish their schools offered more alternatives. In Dominican the subjects this wish list includes 55.6% Foreign Languages, 5.6% Typing and Office Practice for and 4.2% Accounting. Others are Art and Design (1.4%), and Music (1.4%). It is notable there are girls in Dominican who want to study Accounting despite the negative attitude towards Mathematics. It is also interesting that Aviation (one girl) is desired yet only 34 girls study Physics in FIII and FIV (see Table 7.1). Also notable is that fact that nearly a third (30.6%) of the girls indicated that they had no need for other subjects. For this lot, the school curriculum is adequate, even as I have argued that it is lean in terms of subject electives.

The foregoing discussion shows that subject preference patterns are built on a number of things, which are not all school-related. The choice of subjects and preference of some over others is the starting point of career considerations. The next section focuses on career aspirations.

7.3.3.4 Career aspirations
Of the 39 different careers cited in the three schools, the girls in Dominican aspire to 20. Like Yellowwood and Fort Hall, medical careers dominate (see sections 5.3.3.2 and 6.4.4). Leading is nursing (28.9%), followed by human medicine (22.4%), airhostess (7.9%), accounting (6.6%), law (5.3%), teaching (3.9%), hotel management (3.9%), journalism (2.6%), pharmacy (2.6%) and veterinary medicine (1.3%).

With the exception of one girl (1.3%) who hopes to pursue engineering, no girls in Dominican have an interest in aviation, architecture, meteorology, computer science and information technology, all of which require Physics and mathematics. For careers in business and finance the pattern is different. Leading is accounting (6.6%), followed by law (5.3%), journalism (2.6%), banking (1.3%), and business management (1.3%). Again, given the negative attitude towards mathematics, it is almost paradoxical that there is great interest in finance related careers. Others careers desired include those in the service industry: airhostess (7.9%), hotel management (3.9%), secretarial (1.3%), and tours and travel (1.3%) and teaching (3.9%).
Girls’ aspirations for medical-related careers can be linked to the positive attitude they have for biology. Added to the fact that many girls feel obliged to be of service to their communities, it is interesting that these aspirations are perceived as tenable though medical-based careers. All the same, one has to question how realistic the choice to become a medical doctor is given that girls in this school have a negative attitude to other subjects that are important to this career such as mathematics. Although these might only be aspirations, the data is evidence that some aspirations are based on naivety, particularly that biology alone serves to qualify one for a medical career. This raises questions about career guidance in the school.

Data from the teachers shows a low key attitude towards career guidance. Half the teachers consider the programme to be “effective” (50.0%) but since two (14.2%) consider it “hardly effective” and one (7.1%) “ineffective” one has to question the truth of what they really think of it. None (0%) of them is “highly involved”, only two (14.2%) are “quite involved” while the majority (71.4%) is simply “involved” and the rest “hardly involved” or “not involved at all”. The data is telling of the quality of teacher engagement in career guidance. It is clearly not a shared responsibility in Dominican and just because the girls indicate that they enjoy career guidance does not mean that they gain much from (see section 7.3.3.1.1). Without quality involvement from all teachers, the career guidance is likely to be wanting. In the case of this study, the display of uninformed career choices is enough evidence to suggest that there is sideline treatment of this school programme even though it is an important one.

7.3.3.4.1 Career choices: The reasons, the perceptions

Nursing (28.9%) and human medicine (22.4%) are high status career because employment is uncompetitive and earnings high. Reasons cited for the choice show pragmatics to be the motivating factor:

- It is marketable. Unique, easy to be employed.
- Well earning career. It has a high income.

For nursing (28.9%), pharmacy (2.6%) and veterinary medicine (1.3%) the motivating reasons include service to the community service and the need to contribute to social welfare. The reasons point to the awareness of the dire needs within communities.

- I like treating people. Build the nation.
- I admire those who work in this profession.
While this is very refreshing because it goes beyond personal gain and attitude, the science subjects required for these careers are hardly cited as motivating reasons. There is only one case in Dominican medicine is linked to performance in science subjects.

As other data show (see section 7.3.3.4) girls aspirations for careers in technology are low. The only girl who hopes to pursue engineering does so because of perceived monetary gains and the uniqueness of the profession among women:

   Earn a lot on money, a unique profession for girls especially

For those who want to pursue law again the motivation is monetary. Unlike Yellowwood where some of the girls are motivated by the fight for justice (see section 5.3.3.2), money is a motivating factor for doing law in this school, and there is also the perception that it is well paying and even uncompetitive:

   To earn a lot of salary.

   It will help my life.

   It is not done by many people.

Careers that are perceived to guarantee financial security and independence are highly rated by the girls which is a cause for concern because academic performance is critical to these choice, yet it is not apparent. The choice pattern above shows little attribution to academic performance.

Although computer studies have only recently been introduced in Dominican, no girls aspire to pursue related careers yet computer science and information technology is a rapidly growing industry in Kenya. The girls in this school are oblivious to this. There appears to be a reasonable range of preferences for careers in business and finance. In accounting, law and banking there is the prestige that comes with the career so like human medicine the preference is high simply for that reason alone. For journalism, however, there is an attempt to relate choice to abilities and talents even the reasons are unconvincing, suggesting that the specific requirements for a career in journalism are unknown:

   I like reading things around me.

   Express my talents.
Dominican has the highest percentage of girls who want to pursue teaching (3.9%) among the three schools. Those that want it perceive it as a satisfying career:

I like the way teachers teach.

Gain a lot while teaching.

The choice of careers in the service industry such as airhostess (7.9%), hotel management (3.9%), catering (2.6%) and secretarial (1.3%) are based on several things like subject performance, good earnings and prestige:

I like the subjects which are applicable.

I admire the way they are and the professions.

I want some money to help my parents in the future.

Unlike Yellowwood and Fort Hall, none of the girls in Dominican showed interest in fashion design and interior design or music careers. While this can be attributed to the fact that the related subjects are not taught in the school, there is also the likelihood that girls in this school have little exposure to other career openings besides the mainstream more conventional ones. In fact, generally the choice of careers among girls at Dominican follows the stereotypical patterns. Human medicine is revered because historically universities in Kenya only admit top students for medicine. It is the ultimate career for the Kenyan adolescent.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that school subjects are among things that influence career aspirations. The section following examines parental preferences. The objective is to gain insights into other factors shaping girls' career aspirations.

7.3.3.4.2 “My aspirations for my daughter”: Parents career preferences

Out of 43 mothers and 35 fathers who responded to the written questionnaire medical careers feature prominently for both parents. A higher percentage of mothers (34.9%) than fathers (22.9%) chose nursing. Similarly, the percentage is higher for human medicine among mothers (18.6%) than it is for fathers (11.4%). Mothers favoured business management (4.7%), hotel management (4.7%) and secretarial (4.7%) while fathers preferred hotel management (5.7%) and teaching (5.7%). For careers in accounting and architecture and secretarial it was only one father (2.9%) for each. Not a single mother (0%) indicated interest in accounting. However, one mother indicated interest in architecture (2.3%), and law (2.3%) and airhostess (2.3%).
Parental career preferences show similar stereotype patterns to those of their daughters where human medicine and nursing top the list. While medicine is the dream career of every Kenyan parent, parents in Dominican seem to have information guiding their choices. This is because the school barely takes students to university so medicine is not a feasible choice.

An important feature emerging from the data is that 40% of fathers and 23.3% of mothers indicated that the career decisions for their daughters would be delayed until their daughters sat for the KCSE and received the examination results. This delay suggests that parents may be uncertain about the career futures of their daughters, probably because of the outcome of performance in the national examination. This pattern is not unusual. There is evidence that similar attitudes are taken by parents in Yellowwood and Fort Hall (see sections 5.3.3.3 and 6.4.4.1).

Post-secondary education in Kenya is generally expensive and quality education at this level is also competitive. Combined, the two are preventative or delaying factors to decisions on career futures. This ‘wait and see’ attitude is evident in Dominican where there is a higher percentage of parents who did not indicate a career aspiration for their daughters. Perhaps also, this attitude is compounded by the fact that it is predominantly fathers who meet the cost of their daughters’ education (see section 7.3.1 and 7.3.3.1). They would therefore be the decision makers and they prefer to make decisions pertaining to careers when KCSE examination results are known.

7.3.4 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE PROFILES

The survey of the educational choices of FIII and FIV girls in Dominican results in the following conclusions.

7.3.4.1 What kind of girl attends Dominican Girls School?
- One-third (38.1%) of the girls are between aged 18 and 19 years making them slightly older than the official age for their grade.
- The majority (71.8%) of girls are of rural background; the minority (11.5%) is of urban background. These findings are similar for Yellowwood and Fort Hall (see sections 5.3.1.1 and 6.3).
• The majority (71.8%) of girls in this school received primary education in government day schools (83.1%) in rural areas. A few girls (10.4%) had a private primary school education.

• The majority (64.5%) of girls are from two parent families with between 3 and 5 children. 18.9% of mothers are single parents and no widowed, separated or divorced. Only 4% of fathers fall in this category.

• Siblings in the professional job market are in teaching (6.7%) and nursing (4.0%).

• The majority of mothers (61.1%) have a secondary level education and below. 29.9% have college education but only 2.6% have a university education.

• The majority of fathers (59.8%) have college level education but there is a significant 40.3% who have secondary education and below.

• 95.9% of the girls have role models of whom 61.3% are significant others namely, members to their immediate and extended families.

7.3.4.2 Single-sex education: A Dominican viewpoint

• Dominican is not the school choice for the majority of girls (66.7%) enrolled there but for the majority of parents (85.2%) it offers good educational opportunities.

• The majority of parents (64.8%) are not satisfied with what 63.0% consider to be average performance.

• Girls participate in school academic and non-academic activities but the level to which they enjoy the activities or find them useful varies.

• The school principal is perceived as 100% supportive of students, class teachers 97.2%, male teachers 100% and the female teachers 97.2%.

• Classmates are perceived as the most supportive (95.8%) followed by prefects (91.6%) and other schoolmates (90.4%).

7.3.4.3 Girls’ choices and preferences with regard to school subjects

• Biology, English and Home Science are the “favourite” school subjects while Physics, Mathematics and History are the “worst”. The subjects considered “important” are Mathematics and Biology and English. A negative attitude prevails toward Physics and Mathematics but the opposite is the case with Biology.

• 18.7% and 17.6% of the girls do not have a subject they consider as their worst or as important respectively.
• The majority (55.6%) would like their school to offer foreign languages and collectively 14% would like to learn accounting, typing and office practice, music, art and design and aviation. All the same, 30.6% of the girls do not see the need for additional subjects to the school curriculum.

7.3.4.4 Girls’ career aspirations
• 51.3% of the girls aspire to pursue well-paying professional careers in medicine and nursing but there is a contradiction between career aspirations and subject choice. The choices are ambitious and similar to those of their parents.

7.3.4.5 Girls’ aspirations for higher education
• 68.9% aspire to pursue university education, 29.7% college education. The latter reflects a realistic choice.

The Dominican paradox lies in the fact that the school provides adequate physical facilities for learning but conflict arises from within the learners and the environments that they come from, creating somewhat of a conflict between their high educational aspirations and the achievement itself. The reason for this lies in the history of the school including the legacy of academic performance, the home background and the fact that the majority of the girls did not want to join the school even though they are now settled there. Though it is a girls’ school Dominican does not share a similar profile with Yellowwood; it is not established in terms of high academic performance and on this front it is in many ways an upcoming school.

The section following deliberates in depth the features that emerge from the profiles above.

7.4 A DISCUSSION OF EMERGING THEMES

7.4.1 ‘A RURAL SCHOOL?’ SAFE AND QUIET ENVIRONMENT

Data emerging from both focus groups suggests that the girls are happy to be in yet another rural school for their secondary education. While the participants did not come to the defence of their school, the few that showed preference for an urban school were not certain why. The groups agreed that they particularly liked the rural setting as it provided a quiet learning environment. All in all, the girls indicated that they felt advantaged to be in Dominican citing adequate physical facilities, qualified and experienced teachers as reasons why. They said it felt safe. In addition, Dominican did not suffer from the school strike pandemic that hits Kenyan secondary schools every so often unlike urban schools. For the girls, a rural school compels one to work hard because the focus is academic:
Rural schools are very serious than urban schools, that I prefer rural schools … in rural areas students are busy (Hannah FIII, Dominican).

I am so happy to be in a rural school because in an urban school there are so many things that interrupt students for example the issue of strikes (Elisiba, FIII Dominican).

For those that chose to be in the school, the rural set-up fits in perfectly:
I am happy to be in rural secondary school because it was my choice (Lucy FIII, Dominican).

For others the school offered a new learning experience in the social sense of the word, rural schools give proper confidence and one becomes independent not ‘spoilt’. Dominican provides challenges that prepare one for life as is expressed below:
I am happy to be in a rural school because for my primary school I was in an urban school … here I am learning to cooperate with all kinds of people (Catherine FIII, Dominican).

Although some of the girls believe that there were more challenges to face in rural secondary schools than in urban secondary schools, they did not adequately explain why at this point, something I attribute to the difficulty some of them had trying to speak in ‘fluent’ English. All the same, some said that rural schools have limitations as far as exposure and opportunities are concerned. This I interpreted as the desire by some to change from rural life:
I wanted to join a school in an urban area so as to have a change to get subjects, which we are not learning in a rural school like French … I felt disappointed but I accepted it (Lucy FIII, Dominican).

7.4.1.1 Not Dominican! ‘I wanted to be elsewhere’
Although most of the participants claimed to be happy and settled, it came out clearly that Dominican was still not the school of choice (see 7.3.3.1) but they refused to make in-depth comments on the matter. There was evidence of conflict between accepting the school they got admission to and the one that they had hoped to go to. While this may not be uncommon in secondary education in Kenya, both the FIII and FIV participants appeared affected by this conflict but there is the resolve to accept Dominican. How genuine this might be is another matter.

The conflict described above is an inevitable consequence of the competitive education system where merit, based on the primary leaving examination results (KCPE), decides who gets to what school in form one. The girls admitted to Dominican come with marks that are below 300 out of 500. While this is the range of marks for admission into district schools, the
marks are low schools in the same category outside Murang’a District (see 5.5.4.1). This means that the girls in Dominican are at the lower end of the academic ladder.

It is for this reason that the burden of ‘failure’ is strong among the girls in Dominican. Although some girls blame their laziness, in some ways I felt that for some of the participants self-blame is a barrier or hindrance to genuine settledness and academic focus:

When I came to this place, I came coz of results and it is not because I had done well. I wanted to go to another school … schools like Alliance [top national girls school] so when I missed the chance of going to such schools … I came here and I had to decide that now that I was going to work harder so that I can achieve what I want in life and not fail in the way I had failed in class eight [last grade in primary school] (Gladys FIII, Dominican).

For me I wanted to go to a national or a provincial school but since I never made it to one of those school, now that I came to this place it has given me the desire to work hard … at least I will achieve what I want … it has affected me positively not negatively (Irene FIV, Dominican).

I did not work hard in primary level but I came to this school other than the one I had hoped to go to … I came to Dominican that is much further than the one near our place. I did not work hard in my primary level and I kind of find that I deserve it. It is me who worked for failing and did not achieve to go to a better school (Catherine FIII, Dominican).

Since poor performance in KCPE is perceived as the reason for missing the school of choice, the girls appeared resolved to perform well but it is the kind of resolve that is used as an attempt to remove themselves from the blame that they already take on themselves:

When I came here, I decided that I wanted to be the best because in Standard 8 I did not attain (Beth FIV, Dominican)

I came here I plan to do the best in my exam (Rebecca FIV, Dominican)

When I came to this school I decided that I am going to work hard more than I did in primary and what I thought my career could be was to be a nurse (Jane IV, Dominican)

7.4.1.2 ‘I’m gonna work hard & hard until I get my goal’: The fruit of hard work

The road to quality educational outcomes appears long in Dominican. Besides sounding unsure of what they want out of their education, perhaps because of the initial rejection elsewhere, there was a strong perception that hard work is the only way to achieve educational attainment. In the discussions, the girls did not raise issue with their personal ability vis-à-vis academic attainment as they spoke in defence of their aspirations. Rather
they felt solely responsible for their achievements and tended to attribute failure or poor academic performance and not working hard enough:

To my side, when I came to this school I wanted to get a better grade than the one I had in primary school (Lydia FIII, Dominican)

When we came to FI we were asked what careers we would like to take and then I said that I would like to become a doctor and then up to now I am working hard in order to achieve my goal (Elisiba FIII, Dominican)

My goal is to get a better grade so I can further my education to get to my career (Irene FIII, Dominican)

Though the ‘I am gonna work hard until I get my goal’ is a good attitude, it needs examination because of the context within which it is shaped. The participants constantly compared their primary and secondary education but in many instances remained vague about what they meant by ‘hard work’. All the same, their comparisons revealed a mindset that fails to differentiate that secondary education unlike primary education requires a different study approach, hard work notwithstanding. Taking into account that many of the girls showed an inability to visualise or discuss the future in terms of post-secondary education, the constant reference to more hard work was taken as a expression of self-doubt and sense of inadequacy. My hunch was confirmed by the school principal who described her girls as lacking motivation:

… the self drive is what is very important and if one comes to school without that self drive no matter how much the teacher tries on that person you shall have to use more time to counsel her, guide her to see the essence of getting self motivation and that is what will drive her to have aspirations for higher things … (School Principal, Dominican)

It appears that Dominican girls are unconscious of the fact that their attitude to work hard is born out of intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation. The former is critical to personal achievement and is what is lacking in this school. In her argument the School Principal rightly points out that meaningful academic seriousness among her girls depends on the extent to which they feel they belong to a well-performing school. Though the girls appear to be settled and happy (see section 7.3.3.1.1) the discussions reveal that they reject the school, it is not imprinted into their being yet they are well into their third and fourth years.

Asked to explain how they felt about the general performance of the school in important examinations like the KCSE, the girls gave reasons that focused on the significance of this examination to post-secondary education and in particular to university education. Their
reasons and explanations underscore the fact that while hard work is good, alone it cannot secure the quality attainment they desire because their situation is far more complex than that. In the excerpts below the girls reveal how they perceive themselves within the context of a school that does not do very well in national examinations. There is fear and the brave face they put on as they try to overcome, each in her own way, the defeatist attitudes that prevail in Dominican in part are a mechanism of survival:

Me … sometimes I get discouraged … I fear I feel and see as if we are going to fail like them but I try to work very hard so that we can change the history of this school and go to the university.

My answer is no because whatever you think is not whatever I think …

I believe even though there are not girls that were admitted to this school, I believe that there are others somewhere who were admitted to the university that means that even me I can make it to the university. I do not believe other peoples ability.

It has been a challenge to me that this school has not taken any girl to the university in the last five years but for me I know that it can make it because it is just a matter to working hard, so maybe I will be the first one to go to the university in this school.

I do not feel discourage because me myself I can make it …

The evidence emerging suggests that the girls do not take pride in their school; they fail to have a sense of belonging. Instead they associate themselves with the school’s previous history of failure even though that particular legacy is being challenged and even changed because the KCSE results have markedly improved over the years, both in terms of the overall mean grade and the position of the school in district and provincial rankings. The fact that the school has only taken one girl to the university since the inception of the 8-4-4 system of education is for some girls a source of discouragement, they feel disenfranchised. Others, however, are unaffected.

Other explanations indicate the resolve to work harder because it pays. There is also the belief and hope that it will be different for this particular group; it will be the one that will hit the mark that has consistently been missed by others:

In my case, I am not discouraged because even if there is nobody who went to university from this school maybe the next year there will be because we will work hard.

For others the explanations bordered on plain ignorance, naivety and short cut methods to achievement.
On my side if you have an uncle who is a lecturer, he can assist you and you can do bridging courses the subject you have failed. You go and improve and after succeeding you can go direct to the college that you want or to the university.

Further inquiry into the performance of the school indicated a legacy of failure that frightened the girls and one reason why some succumbed to defeat:

This school they have not been performing well for five years. There was a time they had performed very well when it was a mixed school.

However, for others there is always encouragement forthcoming from parents and teachers, which to a great extent helps them where their own motivation is low:

Whatever I have planned to achieve I will achieve it. There are times when you feel discouraged when you show the parents the results but the parents keep on encouraging you to continue working hard. When you have support you can be able to achieve and see you are not lonely you are being supported by many people (Catherine FIII, Dominican).

Teachers advise you to aim higher even if you are not getting the subject.

The girls unanimously agreed that teachers played a more significant role than their parents in helping them attain their educational goals. This can be attributed to the fact that they are in a boarding school and therefore spend a lot of time with teachers and also to the fact that some teachers in this particular school serve as role models (see section 7.3.2.1). The parents’ role is primarily seen in terms of financial provision. However asked whose advice they were more likely to take they shouted ‘parents!’

Asked if the school performed poorly because they lacked the challenge of boys one respondent said that she did not think so but she was unable to explain why. The perception that girls are inferior to boys in academic performance emerged in the discussions.

The challenges of attaining educational excellence are numerous for both for the girls and the staff at Dominican. From the group discussions, the girls discomfort was evident and while they were not pressed to speak in depth about how settled or comfortable they felt about the school, which for most is not of their choice, there was an indication that they appreciate the efforts made by the School Principal to create a sense of belonging and pride about their school:

Last week we were taken to another school where they do well to go and see what they do to pass. She [the School principal] is doing something (Cecily FIV, Dominican).
For other participants the initiatives by School Principal have helped to restore the confidence that Dominican is on a par in its academic teaching with other schools perceived to be ‘bigger and better’.

She has really done something to improve my academic performance like last year I attended most of the Mathematics contests and the one that I went to that really challenged my academic position is the one where I went for nationals at Mangu School. I came to realise that what we are doing is what these national schools and the provincial schools are doing (Lucy FIV, Dominican).

The Principal is trying her best even sending students to see what students who are performing well, what they are doing thus making us to be aiming high (Hannah FIII, Dominican).

Principal has created more time for prep … have developed the school, bought computers …

While the additional lesson added to the daily schedule has led to the expansion of the school curriculum and more teaching time, without students admitted to public universities the school cannot say it has ‘passed’. As mentioned earlier in this study the Kenyan education system is examination-based and the onus on making students pass lies with the teacher. For this reason “the school is driven to make sure they pass” and it is under this kind of pressure that the distribution of time and energy across the forms is unequal, “more time is given to the candidates i.e. FIV and focus is more on the exam.” The pressure is even greater on key subjects like mathematics where students have to take more tests and examinations because as she goes on to explain “they [students] will not be able to convince anyone that they knew any mathematics if they do not pass.”

The teachers are also cited as making extra effort to help:

I think they have gone the extra mile. For example, in this school we have the normal teaching but the extra mile I am talking about is the remedial or tuition teaching. You see they are just sacrificing themselves because they know that if we excel in academics even them they will be happy about what we do (Lucy FIV, Dominican).

Teachers and principal have done research and managed to see what other schools like ours do (Catherine FIII, Dominican).

Evidently, there are many challenges to overcome before the kind of attainment that is hoped for can be achieved. The onus is therefore on stakeholders and, as the school principal indicates, this will occur only when the girls feel they belong to Dominican:

… facilities are there, teachers are there and qualified. Hope with a change of attitude from the stakeholders and the community, we will be moving to attaining better. So my
vision is that the girls should leave here with better grades … all round (School Principal, Dominican).

The focus of the majority of teachers in Dominican is to get girls to join local universities but for some of teachers there is still a vision for the school despite the unrealised dreams:

To have a well-equipped computer room that is connected to Internet which will give the students a chance to learn more about all the subjects offered here (Mr K, teacher Computer Studies)

Teach students skills that they can apply once they leave school … (Mr K teacher, Agriculture)

7.4.1.3 Discipline or timidity: Two sides to the ‘good girl’

For the majority of parents, discipline and good performance are the reasons why they opted for Dominican. Discipline is linked to academic achievement and while both are highly valued in this school, the quality of academic achievement desired is not forthcoming. The question remains as to whether the girls are really academically and socially disciplined or merely cowered into it. Many teachers in this school concede the fact that the girls are well-disciplined and nice to teach but they also say that they lack drive and motivation.

As asked to expound what they meant by discipline the following definitions emerged from the participants in two focus groups:

I have been taught to be a good example to others … to have good moral behaviour …

I have been taught to be obedient to obey older people and even young ones because if you disobey you will not be respected … been taught to be honest, hope when I go out there I will be an honest person …

Godliness is stressed a lot in this school because we are encouraged to go to Christian fellowships especially before we go to our evening preps. We are encouraged to attend Sunday Services. I have learnt how to relate with others and to take care of the needy.

The school has taught us how to respect others. I know when I come out of those school I will be respecting those who are older than me and also the young.

The school has taught me how to be tidy.

The definitions above suggest that the girls ‘have been taught’. In other words, the discipline arises out of the demand for it, so in essence they lack the necessary intrinsic motivation. Their kind of discipline is primarily to please others and not build themselves. It is well
summarised in the observations of Catherine, a FIII student: “girls have soft soft hearts … they do things to please people.”

This timidity is seen in the way that girls relate to their teachers. The girls in Dominican do not make full use of their teachers neither do they challenge them. In F1 and FII they rarely approach their teacher or ‘disturb teachers’ as is commonly said. The Deputy principal observes that FI and FII are the “fearing stage”. She argues that by FIII and FIV they are more open but even in these grades the girls are not known to consult their teachers regularly, they do so in times of crisis. Examination candidates consult teachers more, but they do so for examination techniques and study methods. As one teacher puts it, “they just come to seek knowledge maybe for exam purposes or whenever we are organising a science congress or maybe a student who is problematic in the dormitories.”

With regard to life skills and social skills like self-discipline, responsibility and leadership the girls are keen and willing to seek counsel:

The teachers usually guide us on how to be responsible. Like now for example when at home my mother might go away for about a month or two weeks and I am left at home and left responsible of the home. I do everything and she is aware everything will be alright (Jane FIV).

7.4.2 SCHOOL CURRICULUM: THE RESTRICTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

There is novelty attached to foreign languages, perhaps because few schools in the country offer them (see Appendices M and N and O). It is for this reason that at least half (55.6%) of the girls in Dominican and 14.3% of their parents would like the school to offer them (see section 7.3.3.3). Girls perceive foreign languages as a means to better career opportunities and the girls seem unaware of what they really want to do with foreign languages besides the somewhat far-fetched idea that they can work in a foreign country.

Me I would want to do a language like German or French. The country that I would like to go and work in as the career that I want to be, I believe I will be treating people who only know German and they not speak in English. So that one will help me to relate to those people (Jane FIV, Dominican).

Others perceive that foreign languages help to improve career prospects:

Those who want to do the career of airhostess, they will not just be taken by using three languages Kikuyu, Kiswahili and English you must learn other languages. Doing that kind of career, you will be dealing with different people from different countries (Rachel FIII, Dominican).
Others offered pragmatic reasons for wanting these subjects but they failed to relate convincingly the opportunities envisaged from studying them. For this reason foreign languages remain nothing more than a novel idea:

I would like to urge the Principal she should at least improve some of the languages … people talk in Kikuyu [the local language], I do not like it. Taking French and German, it will change the people from talking Kikuyu to speaking German and French (Catherine FIV, Dominican).

Me I would like to do French because let us say it is holiday you can go and teach people French (Beth FIV, Dominican).

Foreign languages give status to a school because they are mainly taught in the large national and provincial schools. Teachers of foreign languages are also few and difficult to get because the onus to secure one lies with the school offering the subject. For a school like Dominican, its rural location makes it logistically unattractive to such teachers who get offered opportunities in schools in town. Interestingly, the School Principal and the Head of Languages do not think that foreign languages are suitable for their students because they are already poor in English and Kiswahili both compulsory languages. Clearly, in as much as there is the desire to study foreign languages the subjects will remain a dream for the girls of Dominican.

7.4.2.1 Educational dreams and aspirations: The realities
An educational dream is that which one hopes for and pursues through education. Material and non-material gains are both end-products of the education process. For the girls in Dominican good examination grades, taking competitive school subjects and the hope of pursuing tertiary education are some of the more immediate material gains. A well-paying satisfying job and perhaps even a challenging career are the less immediate outcomes. For non material gains there is character development which includes among other things the development of confidence and self-esteem. Evidence shows that securing the more immediate material gains was hindered by self-perception and academic abilities, particularly where subjects determine access to the career aspired to. In fact, from the discussions school subjects pose a major challenge to career aspirations:

When I came here in FI, I decided to work hard so that I can attain a good grade so that I can become an accountant because I know for my career it is good to be knowing Mathematics or Commerce and those are your favourite subjects both of them so I know I can attain it … I decided to aim high in mathematics so that I can do accounting but so many people are discouraging us, there outside that if we did not score more than D+ in
maths you cannot go to accounts. So I am trying to aim high so that I can pass in maths 
and do accounts (Alice FIII, Dominican).

On my side I realise that without maths I cannot do it [accounting] … so I am trying to 
work hard in maths in order to achieve it (Jacqueline FIV, Dominican)

The first quotation (Alice III) illustrates the confidence that comes with the perceived ability 
to manage the successful study of a subject which is not easy in Dominican (compare with 
Yellowwood see section 5.5.4.2). On the other hand, Jacqueline’s case demonstrates the 
repeated belief that poor academic performance is the result of the lack of hard work. It is 
noteworthy that Alice’s negative attitude from other people reinforces the idea that poor 
performance in the past means poor performance in the future, somewhat of a condemnation 
to failure even with the resolve to change things. While it is true that hard work applies to the 
successful attainment of any endeavour there are other factors that should be taken into 
consideration. This unfortunately is not reflected in the attitude of some the teachers:

I do not believe that girls generally have difficulties with learning maths. It is only that 
they do not do enough practice (Ms W, teacher of Maths and Physics).

The reality behind girls’ education dreams and aspirations needs to be deconstructed. In 2002 
the student admitted with the highest marks had 280 out of 500 marks in KCPE while the 
lowest had 186. In many instances the experience of teachers with students of average and 
below average ability is the point form, which almost all attributions can be made. However, 
the sweeping attributions to what the teachers refer to as “non performers” just because they 
join form one with low marks has the potential to give a skewed picture of the whole problem 
of girls educational choices. Ability is only one perspective of the problems students have 
with attitudes to subjects. For subjects like mathematics, the question of ability may be a 
limited way to look at a widespread problem (see section 7.3.3.3) because the inability to cope 
with subjects is not limited to mathematics alone:

When I came to FI I decided that I will be focused but as I am going further with my 
subjects like Geography I am unable to get a good grade so my grades are going lower 
(Sarah FIII, Dominican).

The fact that some of these subjects are compulsory depending on the school adds to the 
difficult experiences even though the students may contribute to it through the attitude they 
take towards a subject:

I can say that it [liking or hating subjects] depends on the understanding. Like you see 
with Physics I do not like the subjects because of the way I do not understand it … the 
teacher can come to the class teach and I cannot understand anything. But you see in FI
and FII it was compulsory and even if I do not want to do it I have to read to work hard on it so that I can fulfil what is supposed to be done. I just believed it was hard (Rachel FIII, Dominican).

The creation of attitude is also shaped by the teachers’ own perceptions of the subject and the teachers’ social interactions within the classroom and students are sensitive to this:

If the teacher is concerned about the subject … teaching well or not …

Liking a subject or not depends on the mood of the teacher, the way the teachers comes in class. Instead of asking the person the questions ‘like Yes, Catherine the teacher is there Yes, wewe [you]’. Now when the teacher tells you that, it is like she is not in class, she is just pointing at anybody. The moment you call the student by name, the student is able to feel like she is somewhere she is supposed to be … somewhere where she is wanted …(Catherine, FIV, Dominican)

Comments like “since I am dealing with girls, girls need cheap subjects … they tend to want to do things that are cheaper … they say Home Science is cheaper … not complex” are telling of what goes on teachers’ minds. Although, as might have been expected, there was denial that these utterances were not his attitude but rather those that girls hold of themselves, the comments allude to unspoken teachers’ attitudes and the beliefs.

For many of the participants there was also the feeling that taking subjects that do not apply to their prospective careers is a waste of time but the individual does not necessarily make the choice of subjects knowingly. The following comment by Head of Humanities, “every school has a tradition where they tend to hate one subject” verifies several things about school subjects, in particular those that are not favourites like Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry. In the year 2001, not a single girl in FIV took Physics and while it has since been resisted it indicates a pattern that could have become part of a tradition (see Appendix S).

Other factors like insufficient apparatus for science practicals also contribute to the attitudes that girls have about science. Not being able to conduct an experiment individually or in a small group often leads to a lack of enthusiasm or even abandonment of learning. Girls get tired of attending science lessons where they have to observe the teacher rather than do things for themselves.
The above cases indicate the accumulation of factors that become the barriers or limitations to good career prospects. These begin with attitudes towards school subject and preferential choice.

The girls in Dominican have many career aspirations but the materialisation of these hopes for a better future is riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies. The teachers suggest that girls lack academic seriousness and go on to cite low ability as a possible reason why the girls perform poorly. Some teachers state that few girls attend to the issue honestly particularly in the context of the highly competitive merit system used in Kenyan education:

… I also do not think that girls are not serious with education, it is only that they do not give it enough time … they do not manage their time properly … (Ms W, Head of Department Guidance and Counselling).

Girls are easier to teach than boys but they lose interest if they find learning difficult … girls easily become frustrated. They do not have a preserving attitude (Mr W, Head of Department Science).

We do not get the cream or top students in KCPE … we get slow learners … if we are given the right material then we would be a big school … the material we get from primary school is what makes the biggest challenge because we have to move a student from a D mean grade probably bring her to a C or C plus (Ms W, Head of Department Languages).

While the girls in Dominican might not have high academic ability it is not a reason or barrier to quality educational attainment. For teachers who recognise this, the perception changes and the girls are perceived as capable as those in schools like Yellowwood. Those who are positive about this further argue that they can compete equally for admission in public universities.

We have the potential [to perform well academically] only that maths subjects has been letting us down. We are trying to motivate them to do well in maths so that they can get to university (Ms M, Deputy Principal Dominican).

Other teachers however, are more realistic and pitch their hopes on what they see, know and perceive to be attainable:

The greatest desire for any teacher is to make a girl go to middle level college but if you are told that all the girls went to the university, you would really be happy and you will have self motivation and attain job satisfaction (Ms W, Head of Department Languages Dominican)

For now the trend is that it will be possible. Now our average is a C minus so we will be getting girls with better marks from Std 8 and that way we will be able to get girls who are capable of going up to the university … one of the problems is the capability and also the
attitude … the attitude is changing … the trend in performance is also changing so I hope in the future we will be able to take girls to the university (Mr W, Head of Department Science Dominican).

Once everybody says that we are producing university material and they go in the right manner than there will be no hindrance to produce a few with the required entry points needed of C+ and above (School Principal, Dominican).

There are dreams and aspirations and there is reality. The reality is the academic performance to which every dream and aspiration finally succumbs. According to the School Principal academic performance in Dominican is average and below. While this kind of performance is not unique to Dominican as selected national KCSE results show (see Appendix M). The trend is towards selected subjects which may well reflect on the ability of the students but if performance in selected subjects in the district is taken into account (see Appendix O to compare) then there is more to academic performance than just student ability.

Academic achievement is raised in the written questionnaire where the majority of parents indicate that they are not satisfied with the academic performance of their daughters (see section 7.3.3.3). The same concern emerges from the experiences of participants in the focus groups. Among other things, the girls blame school subjects and argue that they are always under pressure to perform well in all eight or nine subjects in the school curriculum. The inability to cope and the strategies engaged to survive may appear to be the lazy study methods, but it is apparent from the response below (from both FIII and IV groups) that there are subjects that are beyond the ability of the girls and some they genuinely find difficult:

I usually have average performance but some of the subjects which I usually hate they are ones which I usually read later when the exam is near by which lead me to performing poor in other subjects (Alice FIV, Dominican).

If I was asked I could say we do some subjects not all. Like now I will fail in maths I do not know maths and some other subjects but you see there are some subjects I like most. I be doing those ones and leave the others which I do not understand (Jane FIV, Dominican).

Peer pressure on students to conform to standard patterns is not unique to Yellowwood and Fort Hall alone (see sections 5.4.3.1 and 6.5.2). However, in this school it is not an overly concern as is the case in Yellowwood, perhaps because students do not fight or challenge settled attitudes. Subjects like Physics are branded and as far back as FI when students are initiated into discriminating subjects even before they have had proper experience of them:

I think it can depend on the students you meet. Like us when we came to FI some FIV they were not doing Physics at the time, they used to discourage us that ‘when you start
reading Physics you will not understand … you will understand nothing … some of us were discouraged (Lydia FIII, Dominican)

While peer pressure is great for any adolescent in Dominican, the task of changing attitude falls under the Head of Guidance and Counselling for whom the greatest task is helping the girls to understand that they have to work in partnership with the school. In her assessment of their attitudes towards their own education she said that “maybe … the other reason is that they are not self motivated right from the beginning, have no vision for themselves”. Similar observations are made by the School Principal (see introductory caption).

Subjects in the humanities are said to uplift the overall mean grade of a student. According to the Head of Department Science girls like these subjects “just like that”. Her observation “when I go out there during prep time I see the girls with just humanities books, for science mostly you will see them with a biology book.” appears to suggest that girls are ‘naturally’ inclined towards non science subjects. This assumption is questionable because History and Home Science are not leading as favourite subjects in this school (see 7.3.3.3).

According to one of the participants “some of them [subjects] are pushing you back while others you are passing … the ones you are failing they pull you back … instead of becoming good you become average.” The making of average and below average grades or ‘common grade’ as the school principal refers to them is recurrent in circumstances where girls have to study subjects from language, science, humanities and technical categories.

Such are the complexities with school subjects. According to the Agriculture teacher there are contradictions, “in spite of the good performance in agriculture the government seems to have denied the subject many opportunities when it comes to career and therefore in spite of the fact that the students perform well they are discouraged when it comes to opportunities and so this is a disadvantage to the subject.” Agriculture is taught as a technical subject, the practical skills gained from the subject are intended to create the opportunity for self-employment, and the subject is even marketed this way. However, the irony with the subject is that the students do not appear to want utilize these skills and prefer to be employed in white-collar jobs!
Good performance in subjects like Agriculture and Christian Religious Education is a school curriculum paradox and while schools opt to keep such subjects because of the boost to the mean grades in Dominican, the preference of a subject over another prevails. While there has been an increase in the number of Commerce students, which is not a hated subject at all the number of students taking Agriculture has reduced over the last four years (Appendix M).

Other factors that aid the discrimination of subjects is temperament. According to the Deputy Principal girls confuse issues easily and tend to be temperamental in their response to situations in school:

Girls take offence over very small things, which may not really be big and they interpret them to mean that they are hated … you are rejecting them and all of that … those have been quite many (Deputy Principal, Dominican).

Temperamental behaviour is common in Dominican even though the teachers are a supportive lot (see 7.3.3.1.2). Teachers are aware that there are students who respond to subjects depending on how they relate with teachers:

Girls can be moody when you punish them they make it an issue they do not want to ask any question from you. They fear you they might have a personal problem, they will not want to come to you because they think that you punished them because you hate them, that one has been an issue and especially with the adolescence … you know they can be quite moody (Deputy Principal, Dominican).

We were told by the Principal that we have to love our teachers so that we can love our subjects so many girls have hatred to teachers. Let’s say when a girl is punished by the teacher she may hate his or her subject because she was punished (Beth FIII, Dominican).

Also you find that some students fear talking their problems out to teachers because some students say that teachers go to discuss their problems in the staff room instead of keeping them to be personal … so students fear teachers … students are also pretenders, they are not open to their teachers so that they can understand one another (Margaret FIII, Dominican).

The inability to pay school fees over long periods of time can also be linked to the quality of performance. The cost of schooling a girl in Dominican in 2002 was Ksh 23, 800 (US$ 298) for FIII and Ksh 20, 100 (US$ 276) for FIV. In the course of the year there are always girls who have to go home for long periods waiting for their parents to find money for school fees. Given that the average family has three to five children, problems with school fees would be expected more so when there is more than one child in secondary school as is the case in this school (see section 7.3.1). Few parents in this school are wage earning professionals (see
7.3.2) which means that they struggle to earn money. The Deputy Principal describes the parents of Dominican as “average earners … they are not below poverty line … not poor not rich …” she adds that they struggle with the payment of school fees. In fact the majority of visits and consultations made to the school office are on account of school fees.

The struggle to pay school fees reflects the state of the national economy and the repercussions a poor performing economy has on the family. In Chapter 3 I talk about the opportunity costs to education and nowhere else is this better seen than in a single-sex boarding school such as this one.

A single-sex boarding school does not protect girls from the reality of economic inadequacy. Though a girl may access the school, being a part of the culture of the school is a different thing altogether. Boarding schools are an expensive option to secondary education and the girls know it. The following case demonstrates that because of the added costs to single-sex education it is in fact education for the well-to-do. However, most Kenyan parents in spite of their economic struggles perceive such schools as places of opportunity. The irony is that the perceived opportunities – in this case quality educational outcomes – are not a guarantee, especially not when the economic situation within the home is extremely difficult:

… in some cases a girls may do well and end up nowhere. In one particular case, a girl who had got a B- ended up getting married within a year of leaving school. The girl had school fees problems and had even joined Dominican because she was not able to go to the more expensive school. Her fees was paid for in F3&4 through the intervention of the principal who got her a sponsor but once the girl left school after F4 she never sought assistance from the Principal about her future, she just got married (Head of Department Science, Dominican).

7.4.2.1.1 “University takes forever”: The realities of higher education

The decision to pursue a university or a college education is a contentious issue in Dominican. With the reality of unemployed graduates looming and frequent closures due to student unrest the girls’ perceptions of higher education are mixed. In addition to degrees taking longer to complete, higher education is perceived with ambivalence and pragmatics tend to rule decision-making, as the commentary below illustrates:

If I go to study about the doctor I will take more than four year but in college I will take maybe three years and I will not long being unemployed. At university, I will take more years and yet I will not be earning money and I want to earn quickly (Beth FIII, Dominican).
I prefer college because in university there might be strikes and then you have one year there and you are told to rewind (Anne IV, Dominican).

Me I prefer college because you take less time but when you go to university you may take many years and the career you are taking may not be employing people (Rebecca IV, Dominican).

Me I prefer a college rather than a university. One a university is very costly than a college. Second, let me take and example of Jomo Kenyatta or University of Nairobi. If those students agree to go on strike the year they have wasted they must cover the school fees … the school fees is just adding. Yaani [I mean] they are paying more than that person who is in college. Third one, a person is college is taking less years than a person in university. I believe those people in university they are just wasting time (Jane FIII, Dominican).

Other girls in the same group felt that university education still has appeal because of the financial support that one can get. This support would relieve their financially overburdened parents so it served as a good enough reason for them to withstand the many years of study.

I have come to realise that I should work very hard and join a public university because they give loans and bursaries unlike colleges (Cicely IV, Dominican).

Among the few participants that were in favour of university education there was the awareness that a university education is academic and in-depth. These girls were aware that this was superior to that offered in college which primarily only leads to certificates and diplomas. However, among the girls university education is still perceived as too theoretical for the job market hence the argument that “those that go to university do not get jobs and those that go to colleges and have marketable subjects or courses have very good jobs”.

Besides the failure to gain admission, marketability and study duration are key factors that make students prefer college to university education but for one girl the depth of learning at university is worth undertaking even though it may take much longer:

Most people say that they want to go to college to do things like computer but you know after some time computer will be compulsory so whether you have done it or not it will not earn you a job until you have done something else. I believe for university, when you go to these institutions when you go to ask for jobs, people will prefer to take somebody who is from university than a college because the more years you take in a university it is because you are studying. Those years in the university are not being wasted, no … whatever you want to do you will be going into it deeper (Catherine III).
Another reason why college education has appeal over university education is because of the wide course options on offer (see 6.3.2):

… in the colleges somebody has many choices like for example if you want to take two years in college you can but in university you take a lot of time. Maybe you are young you are going to stay there for many years so you come out of university when you are old … those who go to college are my role model rather than those who go to university … (Jane, III)

At times university education is desired but the cost is prohibitive. In such cases a college education becomes an alternative:

Maybe you have planned once you finish secondary education you will continue with higher education … your parents tell you that they do not have enough money, once you pass they may take you to college instead of university so that you cannot feel bad.

Many of the girls from Dominican end up in middle level colleges taking diploma or certificate courses. This colludes with the perceptions they have of themselves as not eligible for university education. The school principal acknowledges that these perceptions prevail but she appears unable to say why they exist:

After leaving this place because I follow, they [girls] go to medium level colleges. Those who pursue their C- and B+ end up in middle class colleges. Others go to polytechnics where they learn skills like dressmaking or tailoring and carpentry. Some end up marrying and starting small businesses in their homes. A few go to diploma colleges like teaching and medical colleges and the polytechnics in Nairobi and Mombassa and others take certificate courses (School Principal).

Universities are not exempt from the economic and social challenges that face society in general and the quality of education in Kenyan universities is constantly under challenge. From the comments of the Computer Studies teacher “most students do not want to go to university because of the morals … rumours have been spread that people misbehave especially girls, they turn into things that the community would not like prostitution … it has been said that the majority of Nairobi University students join prostitution.” Moral decadence in Kenyan universities is often an unspoken reason why college education is preferable.

Finally, the following response illustrates the struggles that occur within a person as the pursuit of the ‘university dream’ diminishes with the number of years of secondary education:

To me I can that taking students to university do affect me because I wonder kwani [surprise exclamation] all those people who are in front of me like those who went out of form four in 2001, even them they were willing to pass and all of them if they could get A they could be happy. So even them they were willing to get A or to be called to university but it was impossible. Now me I do wonder, even me I would like to be called to
university … will it happen to me … I am willing and after all I will fail. … it normally
affect me because I struggle …

“Sometimes teachers normally tell us ‘even if the school has improved nobody has gone to
the university.” While the girls may or may not question the quality of education, comments
of this kind add to their struggle with inadequacy. The following summarises the thoughts
that are a likely commonality among the participants, “university materials they are taking the
girls with B+ and you will not afford to enter in university you will be forced to go to
college.”

In conclusion, university education for the girls in Dominican is almost like a thorn in the
flesh. On the one hand, they choose careers they know require university education yet on the
other they readily express that for them college level education feels more attainable. This
conflict of interest is particular to Dominican ‘striving brigade’; it is a reality that has little to
do with them but much more with the competitive merit-based education system in Kenya.

7.4.3 CAREER ASPIRATIONS
Career considerations are a critical issue in FIII and FIV. Whether or not aspired careers
come to fruition it is the thinking that goes into choice-making processes that is important to
this study because it reflects on three things: the quality of education offered, the culture of
schooling in individual schools and the home background and the socialisation tied to it. In
the case of all three schools, a single-sex boarding education makes the three even more
significant because of what the literature says about them, in particular the creation of
ambitious, competitive girls with a high self esteem who are inclined to study science subjects
and pursue university education taking competitive degree courses (see Chapter 3 section
3.5.2).

So far, data shows that the girls in Dominican are primarily of average ability. This however
does not deter the girls from dreaming big. Although their dreams may not be realistic or
even attainable, there are particular girls for whom the type of school or the label it carries
means little. In the discussions with the FIV focus group biographies and important
personalities rather than school grades create impressions of what one can be (see also
Appendix K):
I want to do something concerning medicine. I want to be a neurosurgeon. The desire started in my life when I read this book by Dr Ben Carson. After I realised what he had gone through, I felt that I needed to be one. I decided to be a surgeon because it is well paying and second it is a unique career so I decided that I would do something that not most of the girls are not in. It will enable me to go out from one country to the other … I will be the top lady neurosurgeon in East Africa (Gladys FIII, Dominican).

The fact that quality academic performance is a prerequisite for courses leading to the more competitive careers is also known to a few of the participants. In fact, for girls with a clear awareness and understanding that academic ability and performance in school subjects is decisive, career choice decisions are taken cautiously. The decisions here demonstrate careful consideration of one’s academic abilities (see also Appendix K).

If you do not have a good performance, you cannot be a doctor because when you go college they have to look your performance whether you do better your subjects (Jane FIII, Dominican).

About careers, me I choose according to my subject because I know if I do not know biology I cannot be a doctor, so I happen to choose them [careers] according how I am passing the subjects (Sarah FIII).

For other choices considerations go beyond academic ability. The excerpts below show a match between the desire to help others and ones future career:

When we were asked what career we want to be, I said a nurse … I want to be a nurse because I like them and the way they look (Beth FIV, Dominican).

When I came to this school I decided that I am going to work hard more than I did in primary and what I thought my career could be was to be a nurse. The desire came from seeing my aunt and one thing that I kept in mind that I would be a nurse … I attended some hospitals and cared for people and I realised it is what I want. I kept the desire in my heart and even in our family most of the ladies are nurses (Jane IV, Dominican).

When we were told to chose the career which we want I choose the career that we would want in our future life I said I want to be a nurse … I like it in order to help the society and to make it develop (Rebecca FIV, Dominican).

The influence of parents, siblings and other significant people such as relatives is also manifest in the girls’ career choice decisions. In the case of girls from rural backgrounds where there is limited exposure to different kinds of career people/professionals, these people serve as role models whether or not they are acknowledged as such and their influence leaves impressions on girls. The excerpts below indicate demonstrate that even with a lot of information on careers (see section 7.3.3.4) and high flying role models the influence of these significant others is visible in some of the career aspirations (see Appendix K):
On my side I want to be an accountant. I was approached by my cousin, she works as an accountant and I like the way they normally behave. Once I visited her there [in her office] and I liked the way she was calculating using calculators, computers etc. (Jacqueline FIV, Dominican).

My career is to be a teacher because both my parents are teachers ... when they go to job I usually admire them (Margaret FIV, Dominican)

I want to be a nurse because even my mother is a nurse ... I admire the job (Lucy FIV, Dominican)

I want to be doctor because I admire my grandfather who is a doctor at Kenyatta Hospital ... I like the way he does his work by attending well to the patients. I also get encouraged by him and my mother (Joyce FIV, Dominican).

Others link their career preference to the support given by these significant people:

Me, I am on the way there [to meet my career aspirations] because my parents they usually guide me and assist me and counsel me in any things (Phyllis FIV, Dominican).

For others the decision is more complex. While the overall objective is to ensure that the career secures a quality of lifestyle, the pursuit of career dream does not always augur well with classmates for whom the endeavour is unattainable but in this particular case it results in raising more hope than it does despondency.

When I came in FI my aspiration was that I gonna get C+ and above in order to make my life to be better than the way my parents have kept me. My aspiration is that I am going to be an airhostess. Most of the time I get discouraged when I hear some people saying 'but you you can't even be an airhostess'. But me I do not give up I am continuing to believe I will be an airhostess one day ... (Rachel FIII, Dominican).

When I came here I wanted to get a better grade than that one for primary school and my career is the same as that one for Rachel. But sometimes when we discuss about our careers with our friends, they normally discourage us telling us that in airhostess they normally look how you look like, your appearance, your face appearance whether you are short or tall. They say the money they require maybe you cannot get them but me I normally say I cannot give up with my career, I will work hard and work and try and I am sure I will catch up ... (Jane FIII, Dominican).

Yet, for others there is confusion and ambivalence that comes from what they cite as the lack of much needed support from parents:

I wanted to be a lawyer but when I went home and we talked with my parents and they told me that immediately I finish my fourth form I will start doing computer secretarial so that might make me not to become a lawyer. (Cecily FIV, Dominican).

Asked if she was happy with the decision made by her parents, Cecily said that she was not and added that she had no idea why her parents were doing this to her. All the same, she was
aware that could still pursue her law dream at some other stage in her life. Judging from her most recent performance, which is above average (see Appendix K), this is one girl whose academic potential is undervalued by her own parents.

For others early exposure to the career world left lasting impressions and the desire to follow a dream:

I would like to be a lawyer. One day when I was small in Standard 1, we were taken in a Court of Law and I admired the judge and I wanted to be a judge like him … wanted to be making justice (Cecily FIV, Dominican).

For others the pursuit of gender equality is envisaged as part of the dream career realisation:

After I finish school a and I get a job I would like to start a project whereby I will be fighting for the rights of women in our country because I do not like women are oppressed by men (Rebecca FIV, Dominican)

Career pursuits tend to change with the job market. This awareness among some of the girls in this particular school was an interesting finding:

I decided I want to be a nurse because I remember it was 1999 I read that the people that are most wanted outside their country is the nurse. The country that I believe they like is USA, so my desire is to take my course in Kenya and then I be posted outside there (Gladys FIV, Dominican).

When I came to FI I have always dreamed of attaining good marks in all subjects … I want become radio presenter. I feel that it is going to help me the way I want to reach out to people. You see the easiest means of communication in our country today is through the radio. Like if I become a radio presenter, it will help me to reach out and help people to break the silence … like maybe for Aids, I will be able to reach them and they will hear hat I have to say (Catherine FIII, Dominican).

Another interesting finding was the reasoning that teaching is a career that accommodates those who fail to make it in other careers, particularly those that are more lucrative in the job market and also those that are science-related. In this particular case, there is a disregard for teaching by one participant who, ironically, does not have a clue of what she wants to specialise in as a teacher:

On my side I can say that I can take teaching because I am poor in sciences … [after much pressure to state what she wants to specialise in] … I can take History and Christian Religious Education, which are my favourite subjects (Margaret FIV, Dominican).

My career is to become a nurse but the performances I normally get they are discouraging me to go to my career … so I am going to start to work hard … if I fail I become a teacher! (Hannah FIII, Dominican).
To aspire for a career is one thing but for it to become a material reality is another more so in Kenya where unemployment was up to 50% at the time of this research (see Chapter 3). While the girls showed awareness of this and even went on to acknowledge that unemployment is a reality whose consequences are known to them, this fact does not prevent them from being positive about their future or dreaming big. There was an indication that some become discouraged on occasion while others stand on the hope that there will be divine intervention:

Me sometimes I get discouraged I see as if I work hard and get a degree I will be jobless like those who are out there. On the other hand when I do not get a job I can start a *jua kali* business, and be self employed … (Cecily FIV, Dominican).

It does not discourage me. I want go for higher education in another country so that when I finish my studies I can be employed in the county that I will be in (Catherine FIII, Dominican).

It affects me because when I complete my career (sic) I usually ask myself if I will go out and fail like them (Sarah FIII, Dominican).

I know God has good plans for me (Rebecca FIV, Dominican).

Generally, for the participants self-pride is primarily found in white-collar jobs and high remuneration, which are linked to high achievement. In the white-collar job market, “one can feel proud of themselves”, hence the preference.

7.4.3.1 Role models

A number of girls that responded to the written questionnaire have role models (see section 7.3.2.1) from the Kenyan entertainment industry but for the participants in the focus groups the role models include famous personalities that are non-Kenyan – with the exception of Dr Daewood, Justice Aluoch and Pastor Margaret Wanjiru. World-renowned Nelson Mandela is easily a role model because of his selflessness. Benny Hinn is conspicuous a personality because of frequent appearances on Kenyan television. The same is true of Pastor Margaret Wanjiru, a local televangelist who is in her own right a leader because she heads one of the leading churches in Kenya. Dr Daewood a Kenyan surgeon and writer, runs a weekly medical column in a leading newspaper with high appeal to teenagers. Others like Dr Ben Carson are famous because of their contribution to medical health and known to the girls through biographies, while Justice Joyce Aluoch is easily a role model because of her position as a high court judge (see Appendix K).
It is worth noting that among the FIII participants, role models are from the family, that is, parents and close relatives. However, for the FIV this is very different and the variety is also mixed including numerous international figures (see Appendix K). On the one hand this can be attributed to exposure on the part of the latter group but at the same time these people, while highly inspiring, are somewhat far-fetched and far-removed from the daily realities of these rural girls. Female role models are also few among this particular group of FIV and being female does not appear to be a reason to admire someone even though, as mentioned earlier, qualities such as independence and self-reliance were important features in the women cited as role models (see section 7.3.2.1). The following sums up why the girls admire independent women:

Me I would like to be self-reliant and not like other women who depend on their husbands for everything. Maybe they ask for money for food … sometimes it brings conflict. So I would like to have my one money and to be using it the way I want (Cecily FIV, Dominican).

Those who are self-reliant are respected by society (Gladys FIV, Dominican).

Overall, the role of the media in creating ‘admirable personalities’ is evident and its impact is especially strong on girls in the FIV focus group. While these choices are personal, one cannot help questioning why the there is such a vacuum for role models that these girls have to seek them from television!

Asked why many girls in their school find personalities in the entertainment industry so appealing, the FIV group said the following:

I know majority will want to be like those people because one they are modern. Secondly, those people dress very well and the way they dress as the youth will say they dress in fashion. The other thing is that because they are well exposed probably someone will want to be seen on the TV like them.

The way they earn money …

Asked to explain what ‘modern’ meant she went on to say that it meant:

… westernised … they talk Anglo-African English like Carol Mutoko [a radio/TV presenter] … that makes people admire her because they want to be like black Americans.

Asked to explain why some of them from the written questionnaire have role models among peers (see section 7.3.2.1) the girls had this to say:

I admire girls that are hardworking hard responsible and I would like to imitate them … the kind of girls who run to class to do work.
… let me introduce this word intelligent … I admire the intelligent students … how they wake up early in the morning, they comprehend what is taught, how they organise themselves and the way they perform in the exam.

The girls were unanimous that they admire peers who are organised and responsible.

My role model I would like to be like Sarah because she likes working hard … I can copy her in what she is doing … she can help me do mathematics.

Interestingly intelligence or perceived academic ability is highly regarded, which is somewhat consistent and even reasonable within the context of this school because few girls perceive themselves as having high academic ability.

7.4.3.1.1 My mother, my role model

Although many of the FIV participants had indicated that they had other role models it came out quite clearly that their mothers were in fact significant people in terms of those that they emulate. Here the comments of both FIII and FIV are combined:

My mother is a good role model for me because I have observed her. She does take care of her children, she is capable of paying school fees and she does give us advice on how to behave.

My mother is a good role model because of the effort she puts in her business.

My mum is a good role model to me because she usually encourages me about her career, we discuss education with her.

My mother she underwent secondary education and even if she did not go to university, I find being my role model in my life because she is hard working … when she gave birth to us she also tried to continue with her education … she is a hairdresser and they go to school …

For some there was the acknowledgment that the mother attained a level of education which though low was the best according to their abilities. In addition, with the low level that they have, they stand out as hard-working women.

According to my mother’s level of education it means a lot to me because she really works hard and she also encourages me to work hard the way they used to in school.

To me I can take my mother as my role model because she is really caring and hardworking for my needs and wants. Where she reached her education is her best. Now it is upon me to work hard and reach where she did not reach like university.

On the other hand, other mothers are not role models because they fail to meet the girls’ expectations:
I can’t take my mother as my role model even if she was very much encouraging me. I can’t take her as my role model because she was not able to attain what I want to attain.

In some ways, I can take my mother as a role model because she is hardworking but in others I cannot because of the level where she reached. I can’t wish to reach there, I want to go further.

In conclusion, the sacrifice of mothers clearly came out as a reason why they are taken as role models. The level of education was in many instances was insignificant.

7.4.3.2 Parental figures in girls education: the paradoxes
Parents have an important role to play in secondary education and for girls in the adolescence phase the active presence of the mother is even more important.

7.4.3.2.1 Parental awareness of the education trends and the job market
Most of the parents are not aware and they are not sure of the job market. Those who advise their daughters are very few and they are not really able to make career choices for them because first, most of them do not know the abilities of their daughters very well. You may find for instance a parent telling a child to do Physics when that student is very poor in Physics and she has an alternative in another subject where she is already doing well yet he parent insists. You see the parent has not been following the trend of that child. The other one is that most parents are not aware of the careers that are marketable today; most of them are not informed because of lack of education but for others they are educated but are still ignorant and not able to make the right choices. There are also those that already a have a career in their mind that they want their daughters to take but this is not what the daughter wants to take (Head of Department Guidance and Counselling, Dominican).

In the experience of the Head of Guidance and Counselling there are varying ways that parents address their daughters’ education and the question of future careers. However, the bottom line for the majority is that their daughters “go to university”. They have a broad awareness that it is important to pass well and in particular mathematics, but many lack an understanding of the specifics that contribute to quality performance, for instance the relationship between subjects and careers.

This lack of understanding explains why some parents take a non-negotiable position on their children’s education. This is the case with those who are fixated on certain careers for their daughters because “maybe what they wanted to do it and they feel that they will get satisfied if their daughters take what they would have wanted to take and were not able to take.”
For others the choice is based on the parents idea of prosperity i.e. certain careers lead to a path of wealth, “some parents feel that their daughters cannot make it in other careers … some parents feel that some careers are not for women like those that are related to manual like the engineering courses those ones … they feel that they are not meant for women or those careers that their daughters will keep moving from one place to the other like marketing, most of the parents do not like them …”

With the exception of a vast interest in the newly introduced Computers Studies course which parents have funded and advice their daughters to study, at the very least for orientation there are not very many parents in Dominican who show a very keen interest in academic related matters. For this reason the few who do are perceived to be “parents who are enlightened … people who are working … some of them work in offices, they are people who are learned “as compared to the majority who do not bother. The following observations made by the Head of Department Science are telling of the prevailing attitude:

In fact, when we had Parents Day this year some parents came only to see their daughters but in the hall when told to ask questions they do not ask. In fact there was one who was almost booed by the others when he was asking some questions [i.e. making a contribution to the discussion]. The parents were finding it a waste of time as they wanted to go back home. The majority were women at this meeting (Head of Department Science, Dominican).

Dominican parents still have a long way to go as far as grasping why it is important to provide a supportive environment for the education of their daughters. With respect to the support offered in school they do not visit or consult teachers, with the exception of class teachers, and only because they have to visit the school for academic clinics and on open days. The concern of parents at such forums is academic performance and the discipline of their girls.

Asked to describe in general what the parents of the school are like, the Head of Guidance and Counselling said the following:

I think they are just rigid most of them … they are not able to change with the current trend …

This above experience is similar to that of the School Principal who says that she has found very little initiative on the part of parents to improve on the school besides paying school fees. It shows that on the whole these parents are insufficiently equipped to deal with the more pertinent issues relating to the education of their daughters:
Once they pay school fees they do not feel obliged to know what goes on in the school whether their daughters perform or not (School Principal).

7.4.3.2.2 Success does not equal education: Girls perceptions of higher education

The level of education among the parents of Dominican is low but the level of education among mothers is even lower (see section 7.3.2). Asked if the fact that few of their mothers have tertiary level education had any impact on their own perceptions of university education and if they considered them to be successful women the participants pointed out several things among which was that having university education did not equal success. Rather, the ability of a woman to care for her children and to bring them up in an appropriate way was an indicator of success.

I can say that she is capable of taking care of me [citing her own mother]… she is now married and has her own business.

The above response shows that a high level of educational attainment is not a measure of success. For African communities like the Kikuyu, family life is revered and success in life is measurable by the quality of family life (see Chapter 3 section 3.4.2 and Chapter 6 section 6.5.2).

According to Anne, a FIII student, in her mother’s time in secondary school university education was not that important. This shows how perceptions of what success is vary with generation. Many in the group discussions responded in agreement to this:

I do not think that success really matters with education level. At times, it is something that comes from alone and you work hard. Some people they never reach to those high institutions of learning but they have become great people in life. So I think the level of education does not really matter.

Pressed further to say what they think being successful is, two matter-of-fact responses emerged from the group:

Success is being able to meet your needs without any difficulties.

Success is ability to get things without many problem … I see my mum as a successful woman because her education level is secondary school and when I compare her with other women who went up to university level she is better because she is responsible to take care of us. Those other women take drugs and are homeless and beggars of food.

These responses indicate two things. First, that while the level of educational aspirations among women have gone up, university education does not necessarily make a woman successful. As demands of the job market determines what level of education is important the pressure to attain a certain level is placed on students (see sections 5.5.4.3 and 6.6.3). This does have an impact on schools to perform well but the evidence here suggests that staff and
students in Dominican may well have different outlooks on success. For the girls, university education is not life itself.

Another opinion came through whereby the success of women was rated by what they do professionally:

I think most of the women are not successful because most of them are just housewives … they just stay in at home taking care of their children and I think they should do something better … I would like them to have good jobs, better jobs like those of their husbands (Lydia FIV, Dominican).

This respondent went on to say that most men are employed while their wives remain at home. The problem, she argued, lay in the fact that they did not earn when they stayed at home and she felt this had potential to breed conflict within the home especially over finances.

One respondent whose mother is a farmer said the following:

My mother is a housewife but she normally takes care of us … there is no many complaints … she is understanding so even to be a housewife is a career (Lucy FIV, Dominican).

In Dominican, the pressure to perform well and secure high levels of education emanates from the staff. Data from the questionnaire and the group discussions shows that even where the girls are aware of and experience the pressure to attain higher levels of education, commitment can be compromised because of the ways in which they perceive success.

7.4.3.2.3 Like mother, like daughter? The education of women

The question of inequality within education and schooling arose in the discussions. The participants said that they were aware that their mothers had lower levels of education than their fathers, and even showed awareness that the society they live in perpetuates inequality and in particular gender inequality within education and schooling. Nevertheless, they went on to indicate that there was a need for gender equality and related this attainment to female education even though they did acknowledge that socially educated women are a threat to men:

It is not normal for wife to support husband but me I can want to support my husband.

Men believe that they cannot marry a woman who has higher education than them.
For the girls in the FIII group this fact does not stop them from achieving higher education. The response below articulates how the girls perceive this matter but generally, both groups showed awareness that marriage and motherhood is social fact that makes girls choose to underachieve.

That [men marrying girl with less education] cannot stop me to get higher education because now if the society wants the women to be having no education, what about your career … you are supposed to have equal education or you can even have higher education than your husband. It is not compulsory have to help you, even you, you can be helping. We should not believe that we should be helped by men!

The participants pointed out that the kinds of inequalities that girls experience in their education can be linked to the types of schools they attend. According to one respondent boarding schools are better for girls because they are free of the features that hinder girls from achieving:

One thing which makes girls not to pass, those that go to day schools … in the evenings when boys are reading the girls are told to assist in some things like cooking and washing utensils when boys are going on with their studies (Cecily FIV, Dominican)

However, asked why girls in her school do not manage to make the grades yet they are free of these hindrances, she failed to give any further explanation. Other respondents linked the problem of gender inequality to parents and the home environment to which most of the other participants in the group agreed:

At some level the parents have contributed to this. Some parents are traditionalists; they believe that girls are not meant to be at such high positions especially public figures. Most of the girls have taken this issue, we have believed that we cannot achieve more than men have achieved. That is the mentality that most girls have (Gladys, FIV).

Even though we have the same capability with boys there is this thing that has been instilled in girls that they cannot do better than boys … so most of the girls when they are in school you hear they say ‘I want of finish and go to college because universities are meant for few girls and mainly boys’ (Gladys, FIV).

This mentality referred to above is an attribute of life that girls found hard to explain. It is linkable to one’s home environment as has already been indicated in earlier case study chapters (see sections 5.3.1.2 and 6.5.8).

Another dimension that arose from the FIII group concerned femaleness. They said that being female was partly the reason why they felt hindered in attaining their educational goals.
You normally feel hindered because like me, I came from rural areas where boys are performing well in school than girls. Now sometimes I feel discouraged when I ask girls questions about Physics. They normally tell me ‘Physics is not meant for girls but it is meant for boys’. I normally tell them ‘even a girl can make it’ but they normally discourage me and tell me ‘a girl cannot be able to succeed in Physics than other subjects’ (Jane FIII, Dominican).

The above experience shows the kind of hostile environment in which girls take their education. First, the girls have a low self-image and do not believe that they can compare equally with boys. However, where there is the attempt to resist this, as in the case above where a student has chosen to study a ‘male’ subject like Physics the environment tends to become even more hostile and unsupportive.

There are genuine barriers to gender equality that girls have to confront and challenge in a school like Dominican. While it is clear from the FIV group that these challenges are a result of socialisation, where the few and somewhat isolated attempts to resist conforming to the gendered patterns are not supported by creating a supportive bias-free environment, the school becomes just another ground that reinforces gendered belief systems and values. There is evidence that gendering is perpetuated in Dominican yet the teachers fervently proclaim that they believe girls can perform just as well if not better than boys!

Parental input in the educational choices of a daughter are very important. However, as the experience below demonstrates there can be conflict of interest and in this case the parents’ decision appears to take the upper hand.

I love acting but I find in one way or another whenever I do something, something that concerns plays, songs or anything drama my parents support me but the do not bring up the topic as in they do not bring up the topics about talents simply because they see as if my talents are going to interfere with my education. There was this time we choose subjects and my parents said ‘you must take all the sciences simply because science is marketable. But looking from my side it is not like I understand much in science and I prefer taking subjects that are going to build up my future according to my talents. I find it hard my parents are not supporting me, not encouraging me to use my talents and to support whatever subjects I want to take hinders me from attaining my goals (Anne FIII).

Given the challenges of unemployment and the competition for places in institutions of higher education and the pressure that parents mount on their daughters to pursue certain kinds of subjects can be overwhelming but in Kenya it is done in the interest of securing opportunities in the future (see section 5.5.5.1).
It is sometimes difficult to point to evidence of gender inequality within homes but the truth about it is that for communities like this one it is perpetuated in subtle ways. However, just because gendering is not blatant does not mean that gender bias is not communicated. According to the Anne cited above, parents give preferential treatment to boys. From her experiences, she goes on to say that even though she shares similar interests with her brother, unlike him, she does not receive the freedom or level of support from her parents to do what interests her. While she can understand that her parents want to protect her she fails to comprehend the reasoning that she is more likely to pick up bad behaviour and influence from her drama associates. She feels strongly that the treatment is unfair and occurs, to use her own words, “simply because I am a female.”

7.5 CONCLUSION

The objective of this chapter was to find out the education choices and aspirations among girls in Dominican Girls Secondary School. The following conclusions are drawn with respect to their schooling experiences in an all girls’ school:

- There is a clear indication that the girls in Dominican struggle to accept the fact that they are in Dominican. Though they participate in and enjoy key academic and non academic activities, what comes through in the study of this school is that the girls fail to make meaningful use of what is accessible and available to them because they believe that they belong to a school that is not performing well academically, one that most people join as a last resort.

- The inability to fully accept and take ownership of the school and what it offers hangs over other schooling experiences including girls’ identity self-confidence and self-esteem. This debilitating identity has shaped girls perceptions of subjects, higher education and careers. The girls in Dominican appear swamped by the Harambee school background of their school and their home background, particularly the lack of exemplary role models where academic achievement and careers are concerned.

With respect to school subject choices and preferences, the following are the conclusions:

- Dominican offers a relatively small number of subject electives in FIII and FIV. The girls take core subjects including those that the school has decided are compulsory. The girls avoid and hate Physics and are also apathetic to Computer Studies, a new subject in the school. Though the preference patterns are somewhat stereotypical, the impact of negative peer pressure was found to be especially powerful, as were
classroom experiences, teacher attitudes and the legacy of academic performance in the school.

With respect to higher education aspirations the following are the conclusions:

- The girls in this school are pragmatic in their aspirations for higher education. A significant third prefer to go to college rather than university because the latter takes too long, offers low job prospects and is no longer prestigious as it is available though parallel degree programmes.

- While the poor history of university admission in this school is a contributory factor to these choices, the socialisation of the girls and their home background has also been found to shape these choices.

With respect to career aspirations the following are the conclusions:

- The reasons leading to career aspirations are very much the same as those for higher education. However, with respect to career aspirations, the girls in Dominican lack role models and adequate career guidance at home and at school. Their choices are therefore narrow and limited to the commonly known ones. Status, prestige and monetary gain motivate career aspirations rather than academic ability, interests and talents.
CHAPTER EIGHT
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

From the outset of this study, I have indicated the importance of situating girls’ education within a context. In Chapter 2 I illustrated how historical, social, cultural and economic features have shaped the growth and development of education in Kenya and impacted on gender and education. In Chapter 3, I how context allows for differentiated educational opportunities and experiences where gender is a factor of social stratification.

The study as a whole takes issue with numerical indicators of gender parity in education and it agrees with Subrahmanian (2003) that gender parity is “achieving equal participation of girls and boys in all forms of education based on their proportion in the relevant age-groups in the population.” The study points to the ways in which education policies work inside schools and the extent to which they uphold access to equal education opportunities. In the case study chapters I show that that even though Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are located in a district (Murang’a) and province (Central) where gender parity in secondary school enrolment has been achieved, there are differences in how girls experience schooling and conceive education opportunities.

Chapter 8 has five sections including this introduction:

• The second discusses girls’ educational experiences paying special attention to girl’s education beyond school access, school branding, meritocracy and social class.
• In the third section, school subject choice and preferences under which examination-based school curriculum, access to and relevance of subjects and education policy are discussed.
• The fourth section examines higher education and career aspirations. Here home background, including the role influence of parents and siblings in girls schooling, rurality, urbanity, social class and culture are discussed as well as vision of self including the perception of self, the influence and role of significant others in shaping identity and perceptions about self.
• A conclusion.
8.2 EDUCATIONAL AND SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES

There is consensus that single-sex schools are agents of gender equity, and claims abound that single-sex schools provide, in particular, girls with positive schooling experiences, the opportunity to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem in their education (see section 3.5; 3.5.1).

The findings in this study both support and contradictions these claims. Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are all single-sex rural schools but they are not homogenous and so girls experience schooling differently. The same is the case with the educational opportunities available to them. The latter somewhat contradicts some of the literature on single-sex schools, which portrays single-sex schools as havens of educational opportunities for vulnerable groups.

All the same, as would be expected of single-sex schools, girls’ schooling experiences are by and large positive in terms of inculcating positive attitudes and agreeability towards education (see the positive attitude in Yellowwood 5.3.2.1 and cajoled acceptance in Fort Hall 6.4.1 and Dominican 7.3.3.1). The majority accept to remain is a school that is not of their choice because it is a single-sex school and ‘better’ than a mixed sex education. It is important to note that this kind of acceptance occurs at the level of the social organisation of a school which in single-sex schools comes from the ‘social reassurance’ of being around girls only. But, beyond such reassurance do the three schools tend well to other issues peculiar to girls education? In terms of educational choices and aspirations are the girls in Yellowwood, Fort Hall really advantaged because they attend single-sex schools?

The schools appear to serve the educational needs of rural girls by building positive schooling experiences and providing competitive educational opportunities, however, beyond the veneer of homogeneity, the findings are that the three schools do not counteract the gendered social, cultural beliefs and values that interface with girls’ everyday schooling and education experiences. The study has compelling evidence to suggest that schooling experiences and education decisions with regard to subjects, higher education and careers tend to be made through the lenses of gender.
Though the majority of girls claim not to feel disadvantaged by attending rural schools (see sections 5.4.1, 6.5.1 and 7.4.1) there are indications that in addition to girls’ own gendered socialization, the individual culture of each school fosters both positive and negative beliefs and values about gender. It is here that contradictions in single-sex schooling lie.

Like I have argued in Chapter 3, the education of women in Sub-Saharan Africa is for empowerment and socio-economic development. In this connection, secondary education is critical which is why it is notable that the majority of girls hold high aspirations for themselves with regard to higher education and careers. However, there are differences in the way that these aspirations are nurtured and even differences in what is actually aspired for. The fact that there are girls who view university education as unrewarding (see for example Dominican 7.3.3.2) is telling of how successful single-sex schools can be in demonstrating to girls that empowerment comes through education and more to it, that African women should have the better of it. With respect to these particular case in Dominican Girls School, one tends to agree with Longwe (1991) and the argument that in the absence of education for empowerment, schooling can become an instrument of women’s subordination. The single-sex school successfully safeguards girls in their secondary education not higher education (see also sections 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2). These become sacrificed at the altar of womanhood, motherhood and the pressure to conform to socio-cultural values and expectations. The girls in Fort Hall (see section 6.5.5.3) who take to marriage within a year of leaving school without a post secondary education or career serves to show that schooling without the education of and transformation of a gendered mind reinforces these values and expectations. In all three schools but more particularly in Fort Hall and Dominican, girls are unable to relate that some socio-cultural values and expectations placed on females are a mode of gendering that has potential threat on educational aspirations beyond the single-sex schooling environment. The reason for this is because the three schools on the whole are impervious to the gender awareness discourses some of which have been in existence within the Kenyan education system for at least a decade (see 2.3.2), however invisible.

In the discussion above I show that schooling is interfaced by gender, I make a link between school, education and society and show that while girls might have a positive outlook on their education there are socio-cultural features and values that both undermine and determine whether or not aspirations will become reality. To explain why there are differences on outlook among girls enrolled in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican it is important to
consider school history because this determines whether single-sex schooling leaves an impression as an education experience.

Like personal history, school history counts with respect to educational choice and the evidence is that the type and category of school is responsible for the peculiarities that shape its culture and ethos. School history is individual to a school. I found that the benefits associated with single-sex schooling that are, according to the literature, forceful and influential in as far as girls’ purposes and goals for education are concerned (see arguments by Lee and Lockheed, 1990 in section 3.5.2), become overridden by a gendered regime within the very school culture that is aimed at empowering girls. In the case of Dominican, this gender regime probably emanates from the fact that it was a Harambee school. The history of marginal academic performance (see 7.2), the fact that a majority of the girls attend school there because they have been cajoled to it (see 7.3.3.1) and the notion among teachers that secondary school is a place to grow up rather than study (see 7.4.1.3) does not permit girls to create for themselves experiences that can foster environments that empower rather than disempower. It is important to note that although Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are rural schools, the influence of patriarchy and other hegemonic structures is more pronounced in Dominican. The impact of social location appears to be greater in Dominican and therefore the girls in this school command less power and privilege (see Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2001:58 in section 3.4.1). With a sense of less power and privilege the values and expectations that a single-sex schooling experiences should question and counteract become accepted.

Yellowwood is the only one among the three schools with an academic performance record and history of higher education that stands out in terms of quality education output and outcomes (see Appendices Q, R, S and T for comparisons). These indicators point to the history of the school. Yellowwood’s advantaged status lies in its origins. From its origins as a missionary school, Yellowwood continued to build its legacy as a leading girl’s school in Murang’a district (see 2.3.1). Unlike Fort Hall and Dominican, this history has served to establish a school culture that fosters empowerment. This is evident in girls who are positive, vibrant, motivated and eager about their education and career futures (see sections 5.3.2.1 and 5.3.2.2). These attitudes emanate from positive schooling experiences and contrast with those found in Fort Hall, where statistical indicators show that even though girls enjoy being in school in reality they simply manage through their education (see 6.4.1) especially for those
that consider the schools as the alternative choice (see 6.4.1.1). In similar vein, the girls Dominican are shown to have enjoyable schooling experiences (see 7.3.3.1) but in reality their experiences are characterised by fruitless striving (see 7.4.1.1) in a school where the legacy is one of unrealised aspirations and ambitions (see Appendices S and T).

Although I have shown that Yellowwood nurtures positive schooling experiences, there is also evidence of conservatism. This is characteristic of the Kenyan rural lifestyle whereby related values and beliefs permeate into values and beliefs systems in all three schools. Interestingly, as an attribute of social location, this conservatism should come under challenge in single-sex schools but it does not. Rather what the study shows is that individual school histories reinforce a socialisation of conformity through things like the ‘good/timid girl’ ‘quiet unquestioning obedience’ especially from teachers (see sections 6.5.4.1, 7.4.1.3 and 7.4.3.2.4). The study found that gendered values and beliefs stand out as impediments to the destinies that girls wish to create for themselves. They emanate from home and have permeated into the structure and culture of the schools they attend and feature prominently in the ways that girls perceived themselves (see section 6.5.3). They challenge attempts by girls to become agents of their own empowerment (see for instance girls in Yellowwood 5.4.4.2).

8.2.1 GIRLS’ EDUCATION: LOOKING BEYOND ACCESS

In this study I stand in agreement with Schiefelbein and Farrell (1980) that gender equality in education hinges on the enrolment and survival of equal numbers of males and females through an education cycle and further still, that education output is equivalent in terms of levels of learning, gender and outcomes linked to job status and income levels.

While I do acknowledge that school access is an important indicator of education equality (see 3.4.1) and agree that gross and net school enrolment rates are useful parameters in gauging progress towards this goal. However, in this study, as I have said in Chapter 2 (see 2.3.2.1.1), I depart from this discourse. I purposefully examine Murang’a district, where statistical parameters on gender equality reveal a district that is success story in an attempt to argue that even though gender parity might be a foundation of gender equality it is merely a numerical indication of who is in school. In this section, I look beyond the numbers and examine gender parity for what it entails in three girls schools in Murang’a district.
With regard to this position, Subrahmanian (2003) provides definition with which to engage matters of gender equity within education beyond gender parity. According to Subrahmanian (2003) gender parity is “achieving equal participation of girls and boys”. This agrees with the perspectives espoused by EFA and much of the literature on gender equality but Subrahmanian extends this definition to include equal participation “in all forms of education based on their proportion in the relevant age-groups in the population” (ibid.). This assumption is clearly borne out of the fact that education is inherently an unequal structure (see chapter 2 and 3 for these arguments). In fact, it is because of inequality that gender parity has remained a key focus of education interventions in Kenya. Like I have argued in detail in Chapter 3, in societies where patriarchy is embedded in the social systems, the structures that scaffold education tend to be unequal and for this reason place restrictions on girls and women trying to enter the education system (see 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.4.3). But, as indicated in Chapter 2, access to schooling is not the focus of this study. However, the discussion so far shows that restrictions on girls occur within an education system. The nature of these happenings is less visible because gendered schooling experiences for instance do not emerge in education equity statistics. My argument is that gender parity is merely an indication of female presence in school. The attainment of gender parity in Murang’a district can only be considered a mean achievement when the quality of education output and outcomes are commensurate with the high school access and survival rates. This should actually be expected of single-sex girls’ schools like Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican where survival in school is assured. The question that I ask in response to this argument is: does the fact that girls access and survive secondary school translate into an education commensurate with high education output and outcomes?

Whilst I am in agreement with (UNESCO, 2000a:13) that the “huge diversity of contexts that makes performance and achievements difficult to measure and compare”, I am bound to their common identity as single-sex schools. Here, I rely on Subrahmanian’s (2003) argument that the equalisation of gender in education lies in interrogating the more substantive issues of education equality (see 2.3.2.1.1).

As single-sex schools Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are beneficiaries of liberal policies in education (see 3.4.1). The benefits include supportive environments for participation in school subjects like mathematics, science and technical, and grounding for entry into higher education and careers that are male dominated.
The findings of this study reveal that access to an all girls’ education does not guarantee access to the superior education opportunities associated with single-sex schools such as quality educational output and outcomes aspirations (Lee and Bryk, 1986; Lee and Marks, 1988). In the case of Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican the individual school history (see sections 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2) and more broadly the development of education for African girls from the era of colonial/missionary education trusteeship contributes to the low optimisation of such opportunities (see section 2.2.1).

The study is able to show that infrastructure, competitive enrolment, a broad curriculum and a legacy of good academic performance in public examinations distinguish Yellowwood from Fort Hall and Dominican.

For Dominican the Harambee school legacy affords girls an opportunity to get a secondary school education but because the legacy has remained unchallenged, the school is unable to attend to the academic needs of the girls in a more critical way for instance broadening the school curriculum. For this reason the more substantive issues of education equity such as the quality of education output and outcomes remain at the periphery because of what the school is perceived to be. Dominican may have ceased to be a Harambee school, but it will continue to cater for girls who are unable to gain admission into what many of the girls interviewed referred to as ‘a better school’ (see Chapter 7 section 7.3.3.1).

There is a pattern emerging from the two schools. As girls advance from primary to secondary school, secondary education takes on two different dimensions. Schools like Dominican cater for numbers and Yellowwood for quality. The differences are lodged in the individual histories and the gender-neutral humanism that has for a long time informed education polices in Kenya (see sections 2.3.1 and 3.4.1 for details). These polices have caused girls education in Kenya to develop slowly and behind boys education because of stunted gender analysis in African social discourses and denial that historiography has favoured the male and the masculine (Zeleza, 1999; Ochwada, 1995). The recognition of the social cultural impact of gender on education is a recent phenomenon and the assertive move towards redress has been equally slow especially for these more substantive issues in education.
In concluding this subsection, I deliberate why the focus on school access appears to hinder focus on the improvement of the more critical aspects in single-sex girls’ schools namely education output and outcomes.

Kenya embarked on the ‘ungrading’ of secondary schools in 1998. The objective was to equalise all public secondary schools by eliminating in particular the Harambee school classification, under which many secondary schools fell.

Though Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are good schools that provide reasonable good education opportunities, boarding facilities are the main attraction to schools like Dominican. Emerging out of this is a contradiction of perceptions held of single-sex schools. Out of three schools that are perceived as able to develop education for rural girls, one offers girls little more than access to a four-year schooling experience.

For most schools that began as Harambee schools, school access can become the be-all and end-all. It leads to a ‘settled’ mentality that is oblivious to the quality of education output and outcomes. In Fort Hall and Dominican teachers and students perpetuate this mentality when they perceive the four years of secondary education as simply a cycle that girls have to go through at this point of their lives (see sections 6.5.6 and 7.3.3.1.1). For parents on the other hand, the four years are an opportunity to relegate what should be their own parenting responsibilities to teachers (see sections 6.5.6 and 7.4.3.2).

This pattern is detrimental to girls’ education as it affects the high quality of education that girls in single-sex schools should receive. It is interesting to note that in Dominican, the focus of school improvement is on physical aspects of the school whereas the potential for it to become a great school is in the students and teacher caught in a mindset of incapability (7.4.1.3). The observation of the Fort Hall School Principal captures the substance of my argument:

I want these girls to do well. I want the girls to get the best from their education but it seems like the girls themselves do not know what they want in life. Even when we are talking and telling them to have self-motivation, they are not looking beyond the four-year education. They do not know what they want after four years so most of them have no direction (School Principal, Fort Hall).
With ‘a get by mentality’, programmes that are critical to the improvement of education output become neglected. This was found to be the case with guidance and counselling in Fort Hall (see 6.4.4) where otherwise qualified and experienced teachers create a situation where the mentality works against the creation of thriving a school. The end result is that schools like Yellowwood continue to command high educational outcomes because the stakeholders collectively work towards offering quality education to girls.

While I do agree with Subrahmanian (2003) that for the equality of outcome to be achieved the quality of experience of education has to be equal for both males and females, I fail to reconcile what difference single-sex girls’ schools like Dominican make to creating educational experiences that lift girls from their unequal position within education in Kenya. The returns on education in this all girls’ school remain low. My concluding argument on this is that attending a single-sex school does not secure girls an advantage when little attention is paid to the matters that ought to be of critical important in an all girls’ school. Schools like Dominican fulfil symbolic policy requirements in that they create access to schooling (see section 2.3), however, concerning the quality of education output, which really ought to be the mainstay of a single-sex girls' education, the little returns are low because the stakeholders fail to visualise the potential that lies in an all girls’ school.

In the section that follows, I examine access to single-sex schools in greater detail. I attempt to argue that the attainment of substantive equality (Subrahmanian, 2003) is dependent on the quality of experience that girls have in the education and the commitment there is to non-discriminative education at the micro (school) and macro (state) level. In my discussion I deliberate the advantages of single-sex education including the nature of opportunities and the contradictions that arise amidst opportunities. I examine the branding of schools, and discuss the impact, hidden costs and consequences of intellectual, social and cultural capital on girls’ education.

8.2.2 CHOICE OR COMPULSION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL ACCESS

In Chapter 3 (see section 3.5.1), I argue that quality of schooling received to a large extent determines the quality of education output and outcomes. Despite the availability of secondary schools in Murang’a district, the findings show that admission to a school whether by choice or force has implications on girls schooling experiences and education outcomes.
The majority of students, teachers, parents and school principals in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican have mutual agreement that girls are better off in single-sex schools than in mixed schools. The reasons range from the conduciveness of boarding school environments, to the quality of teaching and learning facilities, safety and security (see 5.3.4.2; 6.3.4.2; 7.3.4.2). These features remain important attractions in the choice and are confirmed as such in the literature on single-sex education (see sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2). This notwithstanding there is a different dimension in which single-sex schools are not perceived as equal. The study found dissatisfied girls in Fort Hall and Dominican who expressed the wish to be in Yellowwood. Those in a similar position in Yellowwood also wished to be national schools. In all instances the girls felt that there was a better school out there with better academic performance, better teachers and even boarding facilities (see details in 8.2.3.2).

Literature on boarding schools is scarce and the little there is on independent schools (Henning, 1994; Trickett, Trickett, Castro and Schaffner, 1982). Many independent schools are single-sex schools, but as independent school they tend to be exclusive educational institutions. For this reason, I draw from this literature selectively because such schools are founded on a different philosophy from public schools. According to Henning (1994:10) independent boarding schools generally have small class sizes that help teachers engage every student in the classroom. The classroom settings are often specifically designed to encourage student participation and to facilitate eye contact with everyone in the class. Students are pushed to become inquisitive, and to tackle challenging problems. Teacher qualifications are high and it is likely that teachers will have advanced degrees and even specialised degrees in education. It is for such reasons that these schools have a reputable academic culture.

Henning’s descriptions have little in common with public schools like Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican except perhaps in two aspects: boarding schools and teacher qualifications.

Boarding schools are peculiar to Kenyan secondary education. They offer convenience and are becoming the preferred choice even at the primary school level in Kenya. In rural areas like Murang’a, where students would otherwise experience difficulties because of poor transportation, boarding facilities are particularly beneficial. The study found that more than a quarter of the girls in all three schools attended boarding schools for their primary education (see 5.3.1.1; 6.3.1; 7.3.1). The fact that the boarding school experience has been part of girls’ lives from an early age is a likely reason why there is generally a high preference for
education in a single-sex boarding school. However, the study also found that a single-sex boarding school experience among mothers and fathers influenced the choice of a single-sex boarding school for the daughter (see 5.3.1.3; 6.3.2; 7.3.2).

Teacher qualifications are reasonably high in the three schools (see 5.2.2; 6.2.2; 7.2.2) and comparable to those found among teachers in independent schools (Henning, 1994).

The other aspects are very different, this makes it difficult to draw from the literature on independent boarding schools. Besides the lack of schools, sub-Saharan Africa is known for schools with poor physical structures. However, this is not the case with the three schools in this study. The physical facilities are adequate and in good condition (see 5.2.1; 6.2.1; 7.2.1). The size of the school determines class size. Yellowwood is large in terms of physical facilities (see 5.4.2) and it has the largest classes with over 40 students per class (see Appendix N).

Fort Hall and Dominican on the other hand, have fairly good facilities and resources, but they have fewer students than their capacity, some classes in these two schools have less than 40 students (see Appendix N). Neither Dominican nor Fort Hall features in the examination league tables so the two are less attractive because of their academic standing. Dominican is the least competitive with regard to the merit-based selection used in Kenyan secondary schools (see 7.3.3.1).

For this reason, being in Yellowwood is a thing to be proud of. Besides the choice of the school, good performance in KCPE also earned the girls enrolment in the school. Here, choice and performance combine to create the positive attitude that girls have about the school (see 5.3.2).

However, the converse is the case in Fort Hall and Dominican where enrolment is more a case of acceptance for lack of choice (see 6.4.1; 7.3.3.1). In Dominican it was found that girls felt compelled to join the school because of low marks in KCPE. The lack of an alternative choice was found to contribute to the sense of resignation towards education amongst the girls many whom were not brave enough to speak (see 7.4.1.1). Unlike Yellowwood, Dominican is not the dream school of any of the girls studying there; rather there is an ambivalence which corresponds with the attitudes and perceptions they hold about university education in...
particular (see 7.4.2.1; 7.4.3.2.3). Although the girls in Dominican indicate that they want to pursue prestigious and even well-paying careers, some of them do not see the reason to be ambitious in their educational aspirations simply because they are in Dominican (see 7.3.3.2).

Most literature on single-sex schools does not discuss the boarding aspect, because most of this literature emanates from the United States where the boarding school tradition is uncommon in public education. It is therefore useful to point out that even though most secondary schools in Kenya are day schools, the single-sex boarding school is distinctive in public education.

First, boarding school students use their time more productively than private day and public school students because emphasis is placed on co-curriculum activities like sports and clubs (TABS, 2005). This is exactly what I found even though the quality of the sporting facilities and the emphasis on sports varied in each school (see 5.3.2.2; 6.4.1.1; 7.3.3.1.1). Though all three schools played competitive sport, the girls in Yellowwood appeared to spend more time on it, they also received more support from their coaches. Girls in Dominican participated less in sports and received less support from coaches.

Boarding facilities and all the activities that make boarding school life interesting have financial implications. It is worthwhile to examine why parents still opt for them. A boarding secondary school education in Kenya is expensive (Mitha, 1995; Karani, 1995). Financing education emerged as a problem for many parents as has been reported even in the media (Mugo, 2001). School fees were reported to be burdensome on parents and a cause of anxiety for students (see 5.3.1.2; 6.5.2.1; 7.3.1). In spite of the availability of cheaper alternatives like day schools, the boarding school was widely preferred. Both parents and students perceived boarding schools as safe because their children could be monitored (see 5.3.2.1; 6.4.1; 7.3.3.1). Combined with the achievement advantages associated with single-sex schools, the high cost of single-sex boarding school emerged as a challenge that parents were willing take despite the cost.

Safety emerged as a leading reason for the preference of rural schools by city dwelling parents. It is a trend that has been observed and reported in local media (Aduda and Muya, 2001; Okwemba, 2001). Kenyan cities and towns are insecure and young girls are especially at risk when they have to commute to school daily. The level to which Kenyan parents place
importance on the security of their daughters is illustrated in Lucy’s case. Lucy had been admitted to a prestigious single-sex girls’ school; however, her guardian overrode her choice because the school was a day school in the city of Nairobi (see 6.4.2). Now a FIV student in Fort Hall, Lucy’s case highlights the trust that parents have in rural boarding schools (6.4.1 and 7.3.3.1).

The safety and security considerations that emerge in this study agrees with Jones (1990), McCreadie and Babicki (1994) Lee and Byrk (1986) who found that safety is a traditional reason for preference of single-sex schools when children are female. For the ordinary Kenyan parent, the extra cost of boarding school is a small price to pay for safety and security. This is the reason why schools with little academic standing like Dominican will always have girls to enrol.

In their study of private, public and boarding schools TABS (2005) found that boarding schools also encourage positive personal development.

Boarding school students use their time more productively than private day and public school students because of the emphasis placed on co-curriculum activities like sports and clubs (TABS, 2005). This concurs with what I found. But, the emphasis placed on sports varied with the school and the quality of the sporting facilities (see 5.3.2.2; 6.4.1.1; 7.3.3.1.1). Although all three schools played competitive team sport, the girls in Yellowwood appeared to spend more time on it and they also enjoyed more support from their coaches. Girls in Dominican participated less in sports and also had less support from coaches. This finding reveals that in addition to a learning environment, the availability of quality teaching and learning resources, safety and security, the opportunity to create in girls’ independence of mind are motivating factors for the choice of single-sex boarding school particularly for mothers who have had a single-sex boarding school experience (see 5.3.2.1; 6.4.1; 7.3.3.1). These reasons concur with those advanced by the proponents of single-sex schools (see 3.5.2). They also concur with other studies undertaken in New Zealand, US and the UK, which found that communities hold single-sex schools in greater esteem than mixed sex schools (Harker and Nash, 1997; Glatter, Woods and Bagley, 1997; Cookson, 1992).

A rather interesting dimension to single-sex boarding school education that emerges in this study is the ‘same school’ trend in some families. For girls like Jacqueline and Beatrice,
studying in Yellowwood is in line with family tradition (see 5.4.2). Yellowwood ‘pushed’ their mothers, aunts and sisters to reach their potential, for both girls there is positive expectation that the school will enable them to reach their potential.

However, there is also a negative side to boarding schools that emerges in the study. Parents are the key role models in the development of a child’s self-esteem and self-confidence and boarding schools can hinder this from becoming established. Boarding schools tend to create their own exclusive communities, and easily edge out parents. In terms of the psychological growth and development of girls this is a negative aspect of boarding schools.

According to Kruger (1996), parents with children in boarding schools become less involved in the education of their children because someone else takes the responsibility. I found that some parents abused the convenience of boarding school in that they relegated what should be their responsibilities in their daughters’ development to the school.

In all three schools the teachers and the school principals complained that parents remained absent from the lives of their daughters once they joined school in form one. The evidence showed that parental involvement decreased as girls moved from junior to senior grades. In Yellowwood, some parents out rightly indicated that they handed over parenting responsibilities to the school. In their argument, “the child is with the teacher” whom they perceive as “the right person” implying that they were not only justified in relinquishing their role but acting in the right way (see section 5.4.5; 6.5.7; 7.4.3.2).

The reasons why parents relegate these duties is best understood in the context of the Kenya social set-up. Since colonial times, teachers in Kenya have enjoyed high social standing as so they are perceived as ‘masters’ of education, and because they spend large amounts of time with students they tend to be entrusted with other people’s children in a parental kind of way. The fact that there is someone else to take on parenting responsibilities is partly the reason why Kenyan parents favour boarding schools. The other reason is that the teacher/parent concept is rooted in African familial systems where other adults besides those within the immediate family can be charged with the responsibility of parenting, especially when they are known to spend a large amount of time executing duties that are akin to parenting such as teaching, instructing and mentoring (Kenyatta, 1938). This is how parents in the three schools view the teachers of their daughters.
Other reasons need to be understood in the context of the parents’ level of education. For those parents with a low level of education becoming too involved in the education of the daughter can be intimidating, more particularly in a single-sex school where everything is perceived to be taken care of. Parents get involved when it is demanded of them – as is the case with open days and academic clinics. The distance that parents create between themselves and the education of their daughters has implications of the kinds of educational choices girls make.

In conclusion, there are clearly positive and negative reasons that compel the choice of and access to secondary school education. Many girls have their preferences from primary school but choice alone does not determine access to a secondary education. Academic performance, finance, security and safety are other key factors and all three factors also affect parents. The findings are that because of these factors parents are willing to make sacrifices to have their daughter in single-sex boarding schools. This position favourably compares with that of middle-class American parents who, according to Holme (2002), will do whatever it takes to secure a place in quality suburban schools even if it means buying a house within an area where a suitable school has been identified.

8.2.3 DELIBERATING THE SINGLE-SEX SCHOOL ADVANTAGE

The advantage appropriated to single-sex schools are complex and perhaps even little contradictory. Proponents of single-sex education, Lee and Bryk (1986) and Riordan (1985; 1990) argue that single-sex schools are characterised by quality academic opportunities and a high socio-emotional preparedness. This is not entirely the case in this study. The preference for single-sex schools is high and in tandem with Riordan (2002:18) but individual subjectivities and schooling culture marks differences between the schools, and subsequently girls schooling experiences. For this reason, the high expectations that come with “Muiritu waka ni aretirivo shukuru ya airatu” [my daughter has been admitted to a single-sex girls’ school] are to be treated cautiously because it does emerge in this study that girls do not necessarily build independence, self-confidence and self-esteem just because they are single-sex schools (see sections 5.4.3.1, 6.5.2 and 7.4.1.3).

Other evidence shows sex stereotyping to be a problem in girls’ education. This in fact contradicts the literature and in particular, Hamilton (1985), Lee and Bryk (1986), Kenway
and Willis (1990), Stables (1990), West and Hunter (1993) and Francis (2000) who claim that single-sex education promotes intellectual curiosity, assertiveness, and high self-esteem (see details in section 3.5.1). In this study, I found evidence of sex stereotyping in girls’ education, which suggests that single-sex schools may look like they serve the best interests of girls, but they do not do so fully. Some aspects of schooling prevail over others creating a sense that all is well for girls in single-sex schools.

The study shows that an all girls’ school reduces the pressure of sex stereotypes in peer interaction and undistracted study (see sections 5.3.2.1, 6.4; 7.3.3.1.1) I found that even in a school of high academic standing like Yellowwood, sex stereotyping occurs and is most acute when girls are new to the school and highly impressionable (see section 5.4.3). It is notable that more then anything else the pressure of gender stereotyping appears to target perceptions and attitudes towards school subjects. Even girls in this leading provincial school are no protected from gender stereotyping. Gender stereotyping is a feasible explanation for subject preferences patterns among the FIII and FIV (see Table 5.2) and the disregard for Physics as a subject choice in FIII (see Table 5.1).

The same argument can be extended to Fort Hall. In this school, there is a strong gendered discourse that is interwoven with self-perception. The gendered self (Shefer, 1997) is found to prevail over self-esteem and self-confidence causing girls to be unquestioning and while it is not unusual for girls to get married in or soon after completing primary and secondary school (see section 3.2), the interesting thing about the girls in Fort Hall is that marriage becomes an option for girls with high educational aspirations and who fully understand the value and benefits of a single-sex education (see sections 6.5.5.3 and 6.4.1). No cases were reported of girls abandoning their studies midway because of pregnancy and so it is difficult to explain why this phenomenon should occur within a year or less of leaving school. It is a plausible argument to say that it deconstructs some claims by Lee and Bryk, (1986: 381) that girls with a single-sex school education are able to break away from the gender stereotypes in their societies that hold them back. For the four years that girls attend school in Fort Hall, it is the school that holds girls from marriage. It appears therefore that single-sex education had done little to reform the minds of girls in this socio-cultural aspect. It emerges quite clearly that societal values and expectations on motherhood and womanhood are powerful and influential. They too are part and parcel of girls ‘educational choices’.
This evidence also challenges the claim that single-sex schools benefit two classes of people: girls from the low social economic bracket and disadvantaged minorities including boys (Riordan, 1990). This is because it is common knowledge in Kenya that girls are disadvantaged as a social group because the social system is patriarchal and in rural areas, gender stratification is an accepted norm. As such, however much a might school attempt to challenge the status quo, gendering will remain in the micro system because the broader macro system condones it. These are the characteristics of social location (see section 3.6).

Before ending this sub section, it would inconclusive not to show how rural Kenyan families manage to access single-sex education for their daughters despite the cost and the widespread belief that women in Africa are disenfranchised (Stromquist, 1989).


At least 85% of the girls studying in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are from the district. This means that the education of the majority of these girls is sustained by this kind of economy (see section 5.3.1; 6.3; 7.3). There is therefore a connection between girls’ education and the economic situation around them.

The problem of school fees and other opportunity costs has been studied extensively and found to impact negatively on primary school education in high, middle and low income countries alike. Some of the documented countries include South Africa (HSRC and EPC, 2005; Fiske and Ladd, 2004, Gordon, Nkwe and Graven 1998; Nkabine, 1997), Mauritius (Bunwaree, 1999), Tanzania (Bendera, 1999), Ethiopia (Rose, 2003; Rose and Tembon, 1999), Zambia (Serpell, 1993:11, 248ff) and Malawi (Kadzamira and Chibwana, 2000), Guinea (Andersen-Levitt, Bloch and Soumarè, 1998) and Cameroon (Timnou and Fotso, 1997).
While education at a single-sex boarding school is expected to cost there was evidence that because of the depressed national economy (see section 3.2.1.1), parents were forced to make greater sacrifices for education, especially with regard to school fees. There even emerged evidence of the aggravating effects of poverty.

In Yellowwood, mothers were reported to shed tears at academic clinics on account of the economic hardships they faced to keep their daughters in school (see section 5.4.5). There was also evidence in Fort Hall and Dominican of girls who were so poor that they could not afford basic necessities let alone school fees (see section 6.5.2.1; 7.4.2.1). The high cost of education is documented as a hindrance to access and survival, particularly in rural and poor urban areas (Stromquist, 1999).

In an attempt to regulate the cost of secondary education, the Kenyan government continues to issue school fees guidelines on an annual basis. Even so, the cost of financing secondary education in general is high (Gravenir, 1991). In the last seven years the guidelines regulating school fees have been flouted because schools perceive themselves as having different needs. In 2006, the guidelines stipulated that national schools charge Ksh 26,900 (US$336), provincial schools Ksh 22,500 (US$281) and district schools Ksh 15,000 (US$188) but the three case studies demonstrate the difficulty in controlling school fees.

The majority of parents in the three schools spend Ksh 30,000 (US$ 375) per annum on school fees (see section 5.3.1.2, 6.3.1, 7.3.3.1). The majority are rural and wage-earning folk are in the low-income earning bracket (see sections 6.3.2 and 7.3.2). It is not surprising then, that problems of non-payment or delayed payment of school fees were reported in the three schools (see section 5.4.5.1, 6.5.7 and 7.4.2.1).

The question to ask is ‘why do parents make such sacrifices?’ Most parents invest in single-sex education because they believe it will have high returns. As for the challenges of cost, there appear to be innovative ways to deal with the problem.

Rural communities in Africa have are noted for their agency. This same pattern emerges in payment of school fees. The education of girls in the three schools involves intricate family
dynamics, which show how parents manage the challenge of providing what they believe is quality education for their daughters.

The data show that the responsibility of school fees payment lies with the fathers, however, a notable percentage of mothers, 15.8% in Yellowwood, 19.3% in Fort Hall and 21.8% Dominican, take sole responsibility. At the same time, the data reveals school fees payment to be a collective family responsibility whereby mothers, siblings and even relatives and guardians pool resources (see section 5.3.1.2; 6.3.1; 7.3.3.1).

The payment of school fees by mothers is an interesting finding that contradicts the patriarchal patterns in Kenyan society. To explain this phenomenon one needs to understand why women assume responsibility where education is concerned.

In her study on women’s agency in Kilome district, Ndunda-Kivula (2001) reported that Kenyan women take school fees payment as their responsibility order to ensure that their daughters secured the education that they never had. This appears to be the case in all three schools where the percentage of unmarried mothers is relatively high 21% in Fort Hall, (13.1% in Yellowwood and 11.7% in Dominican. If one considers that Murang’a district is made up of what has been described as a ‘traditional’, ‘conservative’ and ‘male dominated’ Kikuyu community (see section 5.4.1.1 and Chapter 3 section 3.4.2) then the effort made by these mothers is an indication of agency.

In this I have challenged the argument that girls from the low social economic background stand to benefit more from single-sex education than those from a high social economic background (Riordan, 1990). In the next sub section I take this argument further and examine the nature of opportunities in single-sex girls' schools so as to conclude what the benefits really are.

8.2.3.1 The nature of opportunities in single-sex schools

Single-sex schools tend to be associated with high education output and outcomes (see section 3.5.1). The other emphasis in the literature on these schools is the academic benefits they have for disadvantaged groups like girls. In terms of perceptions, I found that both girls and parents associate the social organisation of single-sex schools with high academic achievement particularly in national examinations (see sections 5.3.2; 5.3.3.3; 6.4.1; 6.4.4.1;
7.3.3.1; 7.3.3.4.2). However, in my analysis of the findings I found that this perception was exaggerated. I found that while the three single-sex schools endeavoured to create conducive learning environments and opportunities for girls, the quality of academic achievement was a consequence of many factors and the nature of opportunities was complex and contradictory.

The quality of grades in the terminal examination results for the focus group interview participants (see Appendices I, J and K) and KCSE examination results over a three-year period in each of the three schools (see Appendices Q, R and S) is contradictory to the claims in the literature on academic performance in single-sex girls schools, and especially in science subjects. While I acknowledge that both high and low grades are reflected, the latter are more especially in Fort Hall and Dominican. At this point, I need to reiterate the importance of examinations in Kenya. Unlike the US and the UK, examinations determine admission to the next level of education. At the end of primary school, they determine whether one will be admitted to secondary school or not and at the end of secondary school, whether one will proceed to university, a middle college or abandon post secondary education altogether.

As far as national examinations are concerned, there appears to be a link between the quality of examination grades and the admission criteria used to select form ones in secondary school. Dominican is in the district category so it admits girls with much lower KCPE points than Yellowwood. Still, it illustrates an interesting contradiction. Dominican is a small school and so it has the advantage of small classes, which the literature on single-sex schools claims to be an advantage to girls’ learning. Interestingly, these small classes do not seem to advantage the girls in this school. Dominican has the poorest examination results among the three schools (see Appendices Q, R and S).

Concerning the nature of opportunities in single-sex schools, my findings are that there are a host of factors that aggravate and work antithetically to the academic culture that these schools try to create. These factors are not in the literature on single-sex schools because most of it is drawn from white middle-class private school experiences. These experiences are unique to rural Kenyan girls. They are educational and schooling experiences that are linked to the social, economic and cultural forces that drive education in Kenya (see section 3.2.1.1).
Social, economic and cultural forces are macro level features that affect education at all levels. In Chapter 2, I explain at length that transition from primary to secondary school in Kenya is problematic and few Kenyans get places in secondary school. All the same, there are unattended tensions between the choice of secondary school, which is made in standard eight, and admission into secondary school, which is eventually based on performance in KCPE.

The majority of girls in Yellowwood attend the school not only because they selected the school, but also because of their performance in KCPE. The latter is the more significant determinant (see section 5.3.2.1). It helps to explain why the quality of education output is low in Dominican; the majority of the girls in the school are not in the school of their choice (see section 7.3.3.1).

It is claimed in the literature that single-sex schools serve the disadvantaged, but what the study shows is that the first criterion that determines admission into these schools is performance in national examinations. Performance in public examinations in Kenya has increasingly become pegged to social class and KCPE is not exempt. The study reveals that as far as admission to secondary school is concerned, it is students with access to quality primary school education who stand better chances of securing the right grades for admission to schools like Yellowwood. There is evidence for this: Yellowwood has the highest percentage (19.6%) of girls with a private primary school education, followed by Fort Hall (14%) and Dominican (9.2%).

Kenya follows a meritocratic system where entry from one level of education to another depends on academic ability. Single-sex schools are not exempt from pressure of meritocratic gauge (see section 2.2.2). In fact, single-sex schools are perceived as offering superior educational opportunities so the pressure to perform is great. Claims abound but the reality on the ground and the question that needs to be asked is whether single-sex schooling are truly advantageous for girls? If they are, what is the nature of opportunities? If not, why is this the case?

Few authors on single-sex school literature have linked the success of schools to their origins. Riordan (1985) and Marsh (1991) link quality single-sex education to the schooling culture
unique in Catholic schools. This literature is important to this study because historically the
church has had links to education in Kenya and also in Africa (see section 2.2.1.1).

Yellowwood was established by Anglican Church missionaries with the aim of providing
educational opportunities for rural girls (see section 5.2.1). Yellowwood places great
emphasis on academics (see section 5.2.2; 5.3.2.1), which I would argue is a continuation of
the missionary legacy (see section 2.2.1.1; 2.2.1.2).

Besides quality resources, the values and ethos in Yellowwood are noticeably different from
Fort Hall and Dominican. The pursuit of a strong academic culture is instilled in the girls
through formal and informal mentoring programmes. Christian values and virtues are
encapsulated in the school motto, which simply reads ‘Truth’. The legacy of excellence is
evident in the fact that the school continues to enrol girls of different generations from the
same family (5.4.1.1). This is a feature that is distinct to this school alone and it makes the
school stand above Fort Hall and Dominican with regard to quality education.

The church and school affiliation is not unique to Yellowwood. Fort Hall and Dominican,
partner with the Catholic and Presbyterian Church respectively even though local
communities created both schools. The affiliation denotes the significant role the church
plays in education in Kenya. Such an affiliation gives schools credibility. Yellowwood, Fort
Hall and Dominican are known as schools that uphold Christian values (5.2.1, 6.2.2, 7.4.1.3).
They are schools that can be trusted. These attributes are highly valued and for Dominican,
where academic achievement is low the perception is that there is still much to be gained from
the school (see section 7.4.1.3).

These nurturing environments have been identified as essential to high academic
Harker (2000) and Wong, Lam and Ho (2002) such environments are more likely to occur in
single-sex schools than in co-educational schools. The study found concerted attempts to
foster and safeguard nurturing and supportive environments, however, a covert value system
unique to each school, individuals, their character, beliefs and values posed challenges to
these efforts.
In Fort Hall and Dominican, I found negative effects of social class differentiation. In Fort Hall the ‘royals’ or ‘villagers’ was found to affect the identity and psychological well-being of girls classified as such. The latter were perceived as inferior (see section 6.6.2.1). The classification created a disruptive sense of self, an identity clash among the affected girls. This interfered with their educational experiences; it denigrated some to a level where they settled for less in their education. In this group were girls reported to constantly view marriage as an alternative to economic success where they failed in their education (see section 6.5.2). In this school, I also found dissension whereby some girls openly challenged those they perceived to be studious (see section 6.5.2).

In conclusion, I have argued from the outset that Kenyan education is characterised by a pedagogy of difference. Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are single sex girls’ schools with more or less similarly qualified teachers and school curricula (see Appendix N); however, education opportunities are perceived and effected differently in each school because of the meritocratic selection system used in Kenya, the establishment and focus of each school, the individuals that are in each school and the social capital they come in with.

**8.2.3.2 The game called performance**

In Kenya, national examinations assess learning for the purposes of further education, training and employment (RoK, 1988:42). The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) regulates all national examinations.

Today, national examinations in Kenya have grown to become a very important feature in primary and secondary school education. For key stakeholders like parents and teachers, national examinations are the lenses through which important decisions are taken. For teachers, KCSE has become the focus of teaching and instruction, particularly in form three and four. Rather than make concrete plans, some parents will even put on hold career and further education decisions until KCSE results are released (see section 5.3.3.3, 6.4.4.1 and 7.3.3.4.2).

Examinations in Kenya have become a means to an end and in the three schools examinations are the focus of teaching and instruction. Besides frequent continuous assessment tests, teachers conduct their teaching and instruction around the KCSE examination. In Fort Hall some teachers drill students as preparation for KCSE (see section 6.5.4). In Yellowwood, two
science teachers who also happen to be subject examiners with the KNEC reported that they use subject marking schemes issued by KNEC to prepare FIV for national examinations.

According to Somerset (1996), examination-induced competition is responsible for the backwash effect that detracts teachers and students from meaningful teaching and learning because teachers teach to the test. Warning about this was sounded in the Ominde Commission Report though heed appears not to have been taken:

> An excessive competitive spirit in our schools is incompatible with our traditional beliefs and must be restrained. Every young person coming from our schools must be made to realise that he has a valuable part to play in the national life (RoK 1964:25).

Examination related competition is a phenomenon that developed rapidly in the seventies and eighties when school enrolment increased in primary school without commensurate expansion in secondary and post secondary education (see section 2.2.3). Since then meritocratic selection has not only changed the way that education functions but it has also created images out of schools. A single-sex national school with boarding facilities conjures a different image from a mixed-sex district school without such facilities. Similarly, a school located in the city and one in a rural area. As early as the seventies Court and Ghai (1974:11-13) identified that the schooling system in Kenya was highly academic and favourably only to the minority. It was hierarchal and encouraged competition and exclusiveness. They pointed out that the problem lay in the university, the pinnacle of the educational incentive system, as it dominated practices and rewards throughout the lower levels. The study shows that meritocratic selection did not change despite the introduction of the 8-4-4 system in 1986. With university education still the pinnacle of the educational incentive system meritocratic selection will reign the end result being that “regardless of what is stipulated in the curriculum most schools concentrate on the examination and ignore anything that they think will not be examined” (RoK, 1998:86). As observed in the Master Plan on Education, examinations have become a ferocious sorting mechanism.

Examination performance is highly regarded in all three schools. Teachers and students in the three schools considered tests and examinations as unquestionable indicators of girls’ abilities. In fact, even parents endorsed the use of more tests and examinations for judging academic standards and preparing students for KCSE (see section 5.4.4.1). The study emerged with indication of ‘examination mania’. Teachers and students constantly made reference to assessments as ‘pass rate’ and ‘mean grade’ (see section 5.4.4, 6.5.3, 7.4.2).
addition, teachers constantly categorised students as ‘bright’, ‘average’ or ‘dull’ girls. One even went further and created student typologies:

We do not get the cream or top students in KCPE … we get slow learners … if we are given the right material then we would be a big school … the material we get from primary school is what makes the biggest challenge because we have to move a student from a D mean grade probably bring her to a C or C plus (Ms W, Head of Department Languages, Dominican).

The reference to students as ‘material’ is demeaning. However, it is telling of the elevated position that examinations hold in education. It also indicates that increasingly, education has become a manufacturing factory, where students are perceived as products. To understand how this has come about, it is useful to examine how examinations were structured within the 7-4-3-2 and the 8-4-4 education systems.

Any worthwhile education process that begins in primary school should end with tertiary education (Elsworth, Hurworth and Andrews, 1982). Unlike the 7-4-2-3 education system which had four exit level examinations (Somerset, 1974) the 8-4-4 system has only two: KCPE at primary and KCSE at secondary level.

KCSE is both a terminal examination and the only exit level for secondary education. It is the only qualification that is considered for post secondary education. For this reason, KCSE has become elevated and the centre stage of the 8-4-4 system of education where the pressure is to ‘learn for exams’. The following observation made by the Dean of Studies, Fort Hall illustrates this point vividly: “keeping all factors constant, the student comes here to pass exams”.

In connection with examinations and their performance, this study reveals that because of the competition created by this one examination, performance in the KCSE is pegged to the kind of school that one attends. Teachers, students and parents weight school by its performance in KCSE.

Two kinds of perceptions emerge among students. The girls Yellowwood consider themselves achievers (see section 5.4.2) because their produces results and appears in the national examination league tables. The image of their school is that of success. In Fort Hall and Dominican there is a quiet acceptance that Yellowwood is the better school (see section
6.5.3.1 and 7.4.1.1). There are even doubts as to whether teachers in Dominican hold the same qualifications as those in schools like Yellowwood.

I am of the opinion that these images and perceptions are an unfair creation. They occur because the education system which is meant to equalise educational opportunities instead conducts assessment based on traditional behaviourist teaching and learning theories (Gipps, 1991). Examinations create an unnecessarily competitive educational environment and they alone determine the value of a school and even the future of an individual. Even within single-sex schools examinations have impact in how girls see themselves in terms of gender. They shape educational experiences and the education choices they make.

Examinations fuel competition and as already noted single-sex schools are highly competitive. The study showed that single-sex school applicants will do whatever it takes to secure a place even if it means delaying repeating a class in primary school (see sections 5.3.1.1, 6.3.1 and 7.3.1). In fact, the wide age range of 14-20 and the focus group interview participant profiles (see appendices I, J and K) suggests that there are girls who delayed in primary school most likely so that they obtain the right grades for admission into the ‘right school’ or to the ‘dream school’ (see sections 5.4.2; 7.3.1; 7.4.2.1). These three schools illustrate that there is a problem with transition from primary to secondary school in Murang’a district. In 2000 and 2001, Murang’a district had 7,648 and 8,672 repeaters in primary school respectively (Murang’a District Education Office, 2000d; 2001a). It is also a problem of great magnitude nationally (see table 2.1).

The study revealed that the desire for admission into a good school, high academic expectations by family and school is very strong. But while competitive national examinations play on the ease with which females can make transition from primary to secondary education this particular study shows that single-sex schools encourages grade repetition in primary school. The official age for FIII is sixteen and FIV seventeen years. In this study, the age range is 14 to 20 years. A six-year difference is high but within the Kenyan education system girls who repeat are more likely to get into their secondary school of choice. Girls also repeat for other reasons: because of poor social economic background, low academic ability or even enrolment in a poorly resourced poorly taught primary school. These are the features that emerge in Dominican (see section 7.3.1 and 7.3.3). Repeating grades is not a guarantee to a ‘dream school’ but it creates an opportunity. The truth of the
matters is that girls who repeat classes end up in district schools like Dominican rather than provincial schools like Yellowwood. This is the harsh reality of meritocratic selection. It punishes those who are already in vulnerable positions. In the context of this study and secondary education in Kenya as a whole, I concur with Court and Ghai (1974:11-13) that a hierarchal education system creates competition and exclusiveness that favours the minority. The social class advantage comes into play when examinations become a preserve of few elite schools. Like Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, (1996) have argued when social class is allowed to determine educational choice then education cannot be equitable because social advantage will prevail.

A closely related feature of the realities of meritocratic selection in the education system is the willingness by some students to repeat grades in secondary school in order to secure the right kinds of grades for university admission. For many girls the quest for high grades becomes desperate in FIV. This level of desperation was found mainly among girls in Yellowwood (see section 5.4.4.4). In Fort Hall and Dominican ironically, competitiveness appeared to lessen in senior classes. In fact, the findings in these two schools showed that girls became apathetic, disinterested and even distracted by FIV (see section 6.5.3 for Fort Hall and 7.4.1.1 for Dominican). The disinterest, in my opinion, has a lot to do with a sense of loss brought about by the complex nature of competition in secondary education in Kenya. When girls perceive themselves as having limited options to higher education and the labour market, the emphasis on university education by their teachers only serves to remind them of their inability to compete favourably with others whom they consider better than themselves (see section 6.5.5.1 and 7.4.2.1.1). This finding is unusual for single-sex schools because it contradicts the literature which argues that single-sex schools make a difference to girls’ educational aspirations (see Chapter 3 section 3.5.2).

The second aspect is construction of gender equality within education. Like I have already demonstrated, in an education system that uses meritocratic selection to promote students from one level to another, there are students who are older then their grade, usually these are girls. When age and grade do not match then school enrolment statistics are skewed.

Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are a microcosm of what goes on in girls’ education in Murang’a district. In all three schools there are girls who are older than their grade. With regard to the attainment of gender parity in the district, one could argue that there are more
females enrolled in secondary schools because of the drastic measures that girls are willing to take in order to access single-sex secondary schools (there are eleven girls’ schools and only three boys schools). Without wanting to underrate the significance of gender parity, the reality is that it is not a difficult to attain when the age range of girls is anything between 14 and 20. I therefore question the extent to which it is a fair reflection of gender equality.

Concerning girls’ educational experiences, access to single-sex education, the advantages of and nature of opportunities in single-sex education my conclusion is that there are academic benefits to a single-sex education, however, for the girls of Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican, the competitive merit-based education system in Kenya does not safeguard the academically and socially disadvantaged because the education system operates by a ‘swim or sink’ policy. The ‘swimmers’ are those who are able to take on competition by using whatever is available to them, the ‘sinkers’ are those who are not able.

The evidence suggests that while examinations might play a critical role to ‘swim’ or ‘sink’ is not merely an individual choice. It is driven by social factors, the kind of school one is enrolled in, the opportunities offered and the opportunities seized. The three schools, as I have argued, along are different, however, because of these factors and the elevated status that public examinations have, one is forced to brand Dominican, Fort Hall and Yellowwood as good, better, best respectively.

8.2.4 SCHOOLS AND THEIR BRANDS

The true value of a secondary education should emanate from collective experiences. These would normally include tangible and intangible features of the schooling process. In Kenya, national examination results tend to take the upper hand where a secondary school is being valued. Single-sex schools like Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are well resourced (see sections 5.2.1; 6.2.1; 7.2.1). Combined with the category of a school, its physical facilities and history (see sections 2.2.1.2; 2.2.1.3), judgments are made about a school. Skewed as it might appear, it is a judgement that is used to brand a school as good, average or even bad, yet there are equally important, less visible features, which give a school its character. These features are less tangible but they mark a school as having quality, reliability and longevity.
In this section I argue that while national examination results readily provide a basis to judge a school, they are not all there is to a school. There is school culture, which is expressed through everyday lived experiences in a school and which though it is less tangible, covertly contributes to a school’s brand.

According to (1999:14) “school culture is the unseen and non observable force behind school activities … the unifying theme that provides meaning, direction and mobilisation for school members ...”. It is the overall character of a school and includes the beliefs values and perceptions held by those who are closely involved with the school. These artefacts of culture as Schein (1985) and Hargreaves (1995) describe them, are the behavioural regularities found in language, customs, symbols and rituals. In a school, they tend to be the unspoken rites or norms (Morgan, 1997). These intangible features of everyday living define “what the school is like” and explain “what drives the school” (Pollard, 1985:115). They are features that set schools apart.

The covert culture in a school is found in everyday social interactions. It is situational and unique and established by those in the school as a consequence of the leadership, student and teacher make-up and even history of the school. It creates the routine and rhythm of the school and denotes the ways things get done in an institution (Prosser, 1999). Although some school cultures can be deeply entrenched, new teachers and a change in leadership can challenge a school culture.

In many instances, school culture has either positive or negative effects. Ordinary everyday programmes like evening prep, study groups and weekend leisure activities have consequences on schooling experiences and even education choices. The different attitudes towards school subjects in the three schools (see Tables 5.2; 6.2; 7.2) exemplify the end result of positive and negative school culture, however, it is in everyday collegial exchanges outside the classroom (see section 5.4.3.1), interactions during prep and weekends (see section 6.5.2; 6.5.2.1) and gender biased attitude among teachers (see section 7.4.2.1) that beliefs and values become a school culture.

School cultures differ in terms of typologies; Yellowwood has a traditional school culture (Hargreaves, 1995) which is more or less like the celebrated single-sex Catholic girls schools identified in Marsh (1991). The emphasis on religious and spiritual discipline is visible in the
routine and custom which is rooted in Anglicanism (see section 5.2.1). The school chapel, which was under renovation at the time of the study, exemplifies the importance attached to daily religious activities. Girls attend compulsory Sunday services in this building where they are exhorted to value and uphold a disciplined Christian lifestyle (see section 5.4.4). Christian values are upheld as the foundation of discipline, emotional and social well-being and discipline in this school synonymous with being ‘a good girl’, a term that the Yellowwood teachers used often to describe their students (see section 5.4.2.1). Yellowwood teachers also strongly believe that there is a correlation between discipline and academic achievement. For them, discipline is part of a school’s culture and it is manifest in an orderly and a well-regulated school life that characterised by hard work (see sections 5.3.3). This is the culture that exerts pressure on girls to meet the high expectations placed on them such as high grades in KCSE and pursuit of university education (see section 5.4.4.1). It is the same culture that has created positive attitudes towards learning among the girls of this school, the attitude that one can make it in school and in life (see section 5.3.2.2). As a consequence of this culture, Yellowwood is a ‘brand name’ that offers educational value among schools in Murang’a district, Central province and nationally. It has educated generations of females within families and is for this reason the institution of choice and dream school for many young girls (see section 5.4.2).

Fort Hall and Dominican are different from Yellowwood in terms of their overall school culture. Though both schools espouse religious values, their affiliation to the Catholic and Presbyterian churches respectively are weak. They are less ‘ritualised’ in their routine and custom. The emphasis on Christian values is less obvious in both schools and the reason is found in the origins of both schools.

Fort Hall and Dominican were established through Harambee initiatives and so have less traditional values. Instead there are subcultures of resistance that have developed as a consequence of changed expectations given that both schools are no longer merely community schools but district schools whose ultimate goal is to become like Yellowwood (see sections 6.5.2; 7.4.2.1). Unlike Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are yet to make their mark in Murang’a district. For this reason they strive to establish stability in the school culture but this is threatened by subcultures that are resistant to this goal. The lack of tradition causes girls to waver in their purpose and resolution for education when circumstances around them appear overwhelming.
The foregoing discussion shows that though girls might access a secondary education, the quality of schooling experiences are not the same because schools cultures differ. A school culture has impact on girls’ attitudes to and perception of their school, their own abilities and subsequently educational choices and aspirations. In the next section, I examine other features that are brought into school and how they affect girls’ schooling experiences.

8.2.4.1 The impact of intellectual, social and cultural capital on girls education

Students and teachers by virtue of who they are, where they come from, what they know, do and believe in bring into schools and classrooms social and cultural capital. Social and cultural capitals contribute to the culture of the school and subsequently the different kinds of schooling experiences.

For girls in single-sex schools there is some degree of intellectual capital even though this is assumed to exist on the basis that single-sex schools are superior. Whether or not this capital is exercised is a different matter.

According to Sadker and Sadker (1994:77), when girls reach adolescence there is a slide in self-esteem; they become very self-conscious and “begin to restrict their interests, confine their talents pull back on their dreams”. I generally found in all three schools, that girls generally underrate themselves as women and also that girls were heavily socialised into the gender hierarchy and expectations of their communities (see Chapter 3 section 3.4.2). I found that girls built perceptions and beliefs that women are the weaker sex, and that less intelligence is expected of girls. This trend came through in the explanations given for career and higher education aspirations (see sections 5.3.4.4; 5.3.4.5; 6.4.5.4; 6.4.5.5; 7.3.3.2; 7.3.3.4). It was clear from the focus groups discussions that touched on gender that girls’ felt they belonged to the less important gender (see sections 5.4.1.1; 6.5.3; 6.5.5.3; 7.4.3.2.3). Other evidence came in the KCSE results registered in each school (see Appendices Q, R and S) and the schooling experiences of Jacqueline, Lenice, Isabella, Dorcas, Caroline, Marion, Margaret, Carol and Mary in Yellowwood. It is interesting that while these girls have proven academic abilities (see Appendix I), experiences from home are filled with contradictory gendered messages. Sometimes the messages are supportive of their efforts as women, at other times they malign their educational aspirations because they are women. These negative gendered messages attack self-confidence and the attempts that the girls make to
build positive and high educational aspirations. This attack was especially prevalent among girls who expressed interest in male-dominated careers (see section 5.4.4.4). Here it was evident that the cultural construction of gender easily creates obstacles of the mind. There is sooner or later a justification for some girls to believe in things like: “men are higher than women in their thoughts, what they do, family everything … I feel it in school because some girls compare themselves with Njiiri [a leading boys’ school] and they say they cannot perform because they expect Njiiri to win them because it is a boys school”. This observation by Lenice, a FIII student at Yellowwood is particularly interesting because Njiiri is a ‘brother’ school to Yellowwood and so what that girls appear to be stating is that they cannot possibly be better than their brothers. It is almost as if they transfer what they are socialised into at home to school. Gladys’s report about the beliefs Dominican girls have of themselves indicates a position of disempowerment because they do not perceive men and women as equal: “even though we have the same capability with boys there is this thing that has been instilled in girls that they cannot do better than boys … so most of the girls when they are in school you hear they say ‘I want of finish and go to college because universities are meant for few girls and mainly boys’”. Similar thinking was also found in Fort Hall where the following was observed about FIV students: “in some families there are some traditions … they believe that there are some jobs that are meant for girls and others for boys” (see section 5.4.4.4, 7.4.3.2.4 for other examples).

Gendered perceptions about women are not restricted to students alone: teachers hold the same kind of thinking, as the following comment from a Dominican teacher illustrates: “girls are easier to teach than boys but they lose interest if they find learning difficult … girls too easily become frustrated. They do not have a preserving attitude”. A similar observation is made by a teacher in Yellowwood: “when I was in school, we tended to believe that science is for girls and not boys. That is why you could see girls are on the weaker side … I think there is the tendency to believe that boys do better than girls.” This has perception has been documented (see for example Eshiwani, (1982 and 1983) on the impact that the non study of science and mathematics has on girls undergraduate studies; Wienburg (1995) on gender differences in the study of science; Baker and Leary, (1995) on girls reclaim of science; Githua and Mwangi, (2003), Walkerdine, (1998) and Burton, (1986) on female self concept and motivation toward the learning of mathematics; and Harding (1991) arguments on the need to reclaim that females are contributors to science is female). These kinds of reasons are the ones that motivate for single-sex education for girls.
In the observations of the School Principal, Fort Hall (see section 6.5.3) and the Computer Studies teacher in Yellowwood (see section 5.4.1.1), Murang’a district is very ‘traditional’ in its ways and practices, many of which discriminate against women. It is unfortunate that right from home girls have to contend with social constructions that portray women as having less intellectual ability than men (see section 5.4.4.2). This construction is one that views women’s roles, responsibilities and functions in society as predominantly biological and social (see section 3.3.3 for proverbs on African women). If this is what the broader society, the community and immediate family think about girls, then for the African girl, gendering is part and parcel of educational realities. The contradiction in this lies in the fact that it is hidden.

These gendered realities do not interfere with survival, and in fact single-sex girls’ schools like Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are academically advantageous just as the literature points out (Riordan, 2002). However, developmentally the single-sex advantage becomes somewhat complex. Perhaps because the three schools are socially located in a cultural milieu that is highly patriarchal, girls comply more easily rather than resisting gendered ascriptions and also identify with gendered expectations about women. Observations by the Dean of Students, Fort Hall, aptly capture this immersion:

You see, the society and more so in my area Murang’a. I think there is still a tendency to treat girls as a second or weaker sex. It is line with what I want to say that there is no equality of boys and girls. When I talk of Murang’a I am talking of my community at large, the Kikuyu as a community. These are my personal views. When we compare ourselves with other cultures for example the Western, the girl child in the African sense looked down upon (Dean of Studies, Fort Hall).

Similarly, Mr N, a teacher in Yellowwood:

In Murang’a there is too much tradition and cultural rootedness especially in the tea and coffee zones. Girls are encouraged to be domesticated. In my experience, I have seen for example if a parent has three children in secondary school, he will pay for the boys and then the girls later (Mr N, Yellowwood).

This social cultural immersion is an important factor in girls’ education. It shows that intellectual capital can be restrained in the face of powerful social cultural values and beliefs. Heeding becomes a ‘normal way of doing things’ even when they clearly want to resist taking cultural beliefs that demean and discriminate against women. A case in point is Yellowwood.
If teaching qualifications and experience can be used to judge who a good teacher is then all three schools have good teachers (see section 5.2.2; 6.2.2; 7.2.2). Clearly, these teachers command high intellectual capital, however, their attitudes and perceptions to the teaching career and to the students under their charge tell a different story which varies from one institution to institution.

In Yellowwood, there is positive attitude towards teaching as a career and motivation and satisfaction with the school. Cumulatively the teachers have thirty-three years teaching experience (see section 5.2.2 and 5.4.2.1). These positive factors about the teachers add to the settledness that the girls have being in the school (see section 5.3.2.2; 5.4.2). According to Wenger (2006:1) “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for the something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”. Positive communities of practice lead to positive schooling experiences for the girls. Similar features are not strongly expressed in Fort Hall and Dominican even though there is statistical evidence showing that the girls enjoy being in their schools because of the support they receive from teachers (see section 6.4.1.1; 7.3.3.1.1).

There is also the social and cultural capital that individuals bring into an institution and into their studies and their work. This capital is drawn from family background, personal experience and one’s personal view on life. It is also collective in the sense that people bring what they have to create the values, beliefs and ethos of the group, which in this case is the ethos of the school.

On another level, there is the social and cultural capital associated with broader society and in this particular study, the pervading conservative ways of life of rural communities. This broader level is important because of the impact it has on schools which tend to be unwary custodians of socio-cultural values.

The conflict between a school as custodian of socio-cultural values and individual background and personal experience is well demonstrated in Fort Hall where the ‘villagers and the royals’ demarcates students into a socio-economic divide. As a consequence, there are tensions in the school among students. They were found to be unsupportive of one another in their relationships with each other (see section 6.5.3 in Fort Hall). In addition, they harboured unhealthy suspicion between them and their teachers. This subculture undermined efforts by
the new school principal to create a cohesive nurturing school culture. The case is similar in Dominica, where apathy undermines hope and optimism (see section 7.4.11).

In both schools a survivalist subculture is manifest. Hargreaves (1995) defines the survivalist school culture as one with low social cohesion and low social control. Schools with such a culture are characterised by insecurity and low morale. To some extent this is the case in Dominican. In this school, life is lived a day at a time and girls will succumb to outside pressures. This is especially pronounced in Fort Hall where girls get married and give up their educational dreams and aspirations (see section 6.5.5.3). Similarly girls in Dominican choose marriage when their economic situation becomes unbearable. Some are also willing to underplay their education and intellectual abilities so that they can secure a marriage partner (see section 7.4.3.2.4). This feature is typical of girls in mixed sex classrooms where girls play dumb: refuse to appear too aggressive and intelligent before boys so as not to draw attention to their abilities. It is therefore odd that Dominican girls will opt not to take their education beyond secondary school so that they can secure a marriage partner (7.4.3.2.4).

The observation that: “some girls do believe that if they get higher education than men they will not get married and others believe that as they continue with their learning like in university they will not get husbands because of their age” appears to be cheeky girlish sentiment but it is in fact a powerful verbal announcement of what girls believe. It is an alternative that is deeply ingrained in social discourses that value marriage over education. It accepts the belief that that ‘education is not all there is to life’ and the thinking that ‘I can get married and be looked after’.

It is important to note that the power in this discourse lies in the fact that girls have been affected by it. Lucy’s mother married early. This marriage is a constant reminder that her own education can be threatened (see section 5.4.4.2). For Sylvia there is genuine interest to pursue higher education but there is also a concern that she needs to be married by the age of 28 (see section 5.4.4.4). For such girls, a marriage proposal can thwart educational dreams and aspirations.

The study shows that even in communities where education is highly valued the expectations on women are the same, childbearing and motherhood (see section 3.3.3). In his assessment of this delicate matter, the Dean of Studies, Fort Hall attributed the ‘marriage alternative’ to
societal expectations and the way girls are socialisation. ‘Marriage or higher education?’ appears to be an unspoken struggle within the lives of girls in each of the three schools and for those caught up in a situation where education seems unyielding, marriage is an alternative to a dead end road:

This finding proves that beyond their social organisation, single-sex girls’ are controlled by a powerful patriarchal order whose values and beliefs come into conflict with the sacrifices that girls have to make in order to reap the full benefits of this privileged education. It contradicts claims that girls in single-sex schools enjoy a reduction in sex stereotyped peer pressure (Riordan, 2002). It shows that the position of gender within education in the three schools is still in the eighties, a situation that is comparable to the one reported in studies by Kessler, Ashenden, Connell, and Dowsett (1985) and Thorne (1993).

Finally, these findings also warrant one to question what kind of nurturing, equitable and enabling learning environment there are in these single-sex girls’ schools. I would argue that there are subcultures in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican. Subcultures according to Morgan (1997:137) these have a competing value system that is driven and based on gender, race, language, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, friendship and even professional affiliation. The subcultures at work in the three schools are gender based.

Subcultures generate or tear down perceptions. They are partly responsible for the different ways that the three schools are branded. There is ‘my dream school’ in the case of Yellowwood the ‘alternative school’ in the case of Fort Hall (see section 6.4.1) and ‘my school but another’s choice’ in the case of Dominican (see section 7.3.3.1).

8.2.4.2 ‘They lack drive and motivation’: Allegation or truth?
Generally speaking, the support received from male and female teachers, the school principal and schoolmates, and also the fact that the majority of teachers consider themselves as role models, is an indication that girls receive their education in relatively nurturing environments (see section 5.3.2.3; 6.4.1.1; 7.3.3.1.1). However, the general malaise, lack of drive and motivation reported among some of the girls somewhat contradicts the claims that girls in single-sex schools are highly motivated and able to manoeuvre their education free of gender stereotypes (see Carpenter, 1985; Lee and Bryk, 1986) (see section 3.5 and 3.5.1).
Drive and motivation influence educational choices so it is important that these choices, which are individually made, are revived from the context that girls come from. This is because women’s lives are full of contradictions, and factors in girls’ education that may appear as opportunities can be liabilities.

By the time girls make their first major educational decision – the choice of subjects – in form three, certain preference patterns begin to emerge. These patterns are intuitively known to school principals and associated with lack drive and motivation.

So I think it is the child herself. The child I have over here has all the potential but it is like there is something tying that potential that is really not coming out, so I am still looking for that which is tying them (School Principal, Yellowwood School).

I want these girls to do well. I want the girls to get the best from their education but it seems like the girls themselves do not know what they want in life. Even when we are talking and telling them to have self-motivation, they are not looking beyond the four-year education. They do not know what they want after four years so most of them have no direction (School Principal, Fort Hall School).

The self drive is what is very important and if one comes to school without that self drive no matter how much the teacher tries on that person you shall have to use more time to counsel her, guide her to see the essence of getting self motivation and that is what will drive her to have aspirations for higher things (School Principal, Dominican School).

In all three schools school principals and the teachers repeatedly indicated that their girls did not work hard enough and in some cases they even stated that they were distracted (see section for example Fort Hall 6.4.3; 6.5.2; 6.5.4 and Dominican 7.3.3.2, 7.4.1.2; 7.4.2.1).

It is interesting that the lack of drive and motivation is linked to the individual, the assumption being that the school and community has little to do with it. While it might be true that girls do not work as hard as they could especially with regard to consistency, it is important to consider why for instance girls in Fort Hall work hard because of the threat of examinations (see section 6.5.4) while the ones in Dominican believe that more work will salvage them from getting poor grades (see section 7.4.1.2). In both schools, there is evidence that the schools provide an environment that is conducive to learning, but it takes more than hard work to cut it in an environment where gendering is fundamentally unquestioned as is the case in the three schools. The majority of teachers in Yellowwood believe that drive and motivation comes from the quality of girls admitted to a school: “we get good material and the girls perform well so one feels like the work is worthy”. Few teachers counter this
argument even though they know that drive and motivation also come from the perceptions girls have of themselves and the background they come from. In Dominican lack of drive and motivation are enforced by teachers themselves. In a school the size of Dominican, when teachers fail to identify girls by their names there is a clear indication that teachers have no real interest in who they are (see section 7.4.2.1). Girls pick resentment and react by choosing to remain nameless entities in the classroom either as an act of defiance or to show that they are indeed what the teachers think they are. Withdrawal is typical of females in co-education classrooms; however in this particular case, girls experience the crushing of their self-worth and believe that their teachers hate them. Any correction is taken negatively because the reverse of self-worth is insecurity (see section 7.4.2.1). This trend invariably leads to disinterest, de-motivation and lack of drive and has costly consequences in the long term.

Teacher/student relationships also foster demotivation and lack of drive among girls. In Fort Hall, some of teachers resent having a close relationship with their students because they believe that familiarity breeds disrespect (see section 6.5.4). Closeness with male teachers leads to suspicion.

These various scenarios demonstrate that the nurturing environments are not necessarily what they appear to be just because a school is single-sex. The willingness to create such environments seems absent in Dominican and Fort Hall, probably because the teachers, who are the ones that initiate the creation of such spaces, appear less committed compared with to those in Yellowwood. The consequences are that girls gain much less then they should from single-sex schooling, which should not be the case considering that a single-sex education is privileged education in Kenya.

8.3 CHOICE AND PREFERENCE OF SCHOOL SUBJECTS

In as far as subject choices are concerned, one could argue that the availability of science, mathematics and technology subjects and the fact that girls are studying subjects previously considered a male domain counts for the quality of education output. However, the choice of subjects and preference patterns does not yet compare to the UK where girls have even caught up with boys in achievement in science subjects (see Francis, 2000). What is evident in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican is an acceptance of the subjects rather than a deep interest in the subjects. A deep interest and the study of subjects considered to be a male
domain is an attribute linked to single-sex education. Why this is not the case in Fort Hall and Dominican in particular is subject to discussion. This section deliberates why girls in single-sex schools with reasonably good learning and teaching resources still have subject biases especially against mathematics, science and technology subjects. The differences are among other things gendered in terms of attitude and closely comparable to Harvey (1984).

8.3.1 THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM: ACCESS AND EQUITY

Technically speaking, subjects on the secondary school national curriculum are equally accessible for girls and boys as there are no restrictions on the basis of gender. Nonetheless, procedural and regulative polices guiding curriculum implementation tend to be restrictive and even biased towards girls, a factor that can be attributed to the conservative treatment of gender in key education polices in Kenya (see section 2.3.1). Concerning curriculum implementation in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican, school size (see Appendix L for subject distribution by streams) and gender (see Appendix M for gender comparisons by subject) emerged as subject-related restrictions. These restrictions show that even within single-sex schools the playing field is not level. For this reason, this section pays particular attention to subject access in single-sex schools because of the educational advantages associated with these schools. Two reasons are given to explain the differences in access and equity. The first reason concerns school subjects and the discrimination that comes as a consequence of gender, where focus is made on science and technical subjects as a curriculum issue. The second reason is related to school size and curriculum implementation where focus is made on the criterion used to decide which the subjects are offered in each individual school.

8.3.1.1 Science and technical subjects as a curriculum issue

The national secondary school curriculum is fairly standardised. At the time of the study, 33 different subjects were offered in public secondary schools (MoES&T, 2002). English, Kiswahili, Mathematics were compulsory subjects and also examinable at KCSE. These subjects focus on numeracy, literacy and to some extent scientific skills but, more importantly, they ensure that some form of subject equity in secondary education is maintained. The 8-4-4 system of education aims to provide a practical-oriented curriculum that enables school leavers to access a wider range of employment opportunities and especially self-employment (RoK, 1984:1; RoK, 1988:8). In practice this means that both males and females
should easily access science and technology education. Although the national curriculum requires that all students take at least two science subjects from among Biology, Physics and Chemistry in form three, these subjects are classified as options. There is evidence that girls study science subjects because they are compelled to so they take what they must and selectively avoid Physics (see section 5.3.3.1; 6.4.3; 7.3.3.3). The consequences of this are numerous. Most glaring, however, is low participation in science and technology education nationally (see Appendix M). This same pattern is evident in girls’ schools in Murang’a District warranting one to question whether there are achievement advantages in single-sex schools in as far as science and technology education is concerned (see Appendices O, Q, R and S).

Secondary education is the gateway to scientific and technological advancement and, as indicated in Chapter 3, women are integral to its achievement and sustainability (see section 3.2.1). For Kenya to reach its target of an industrialised economy by 2020, the focus of secondary education has to be on science and technology subjects and on female access to and participation in these subjects. So, while the study of two science subjects at KCSE is a step in the right direction, the fact that science subjects are optional in forms three and four creates room for avoidance and negative attitudes. Seemingly, when science is an option, there is marginal participation among girls. In fact, the curriculum is rather lenient in this regard because secondary school science and technology is the foundation for the economic development Kenya envisages as the future.

Concerning applied and technical subjects, the study shows that girls are deprived of a curriculum that is rich in technical subjects. There are eleven subjects in this category but female participation is low (see Appendix M for national trends in 1999-2001). The pattern is similar in girls’ schools in Murang’a district (see Appendices O and P) and also in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican (see Appendix N). At the national level, girls appear to have fewer options among technical subjects. There is even no evidence of female participation in Aviation Technology. The study verifies this as true as the three girls schools do not offer ‘hard’ technical subjects such as Aviation Technology, Building and Construction, Drawing and Design, Electricity, Metal Work, Power Mechanics, or Wood Work. Instead, girls have to contend with ‘soft’ technical subjects such as Agriculture, Home Science, Art and Design and the more recently introduced Computer Studies (for comparison see section 5.2.1 for Yellowwood; 6.2.1 for Fort Hall and 7.2.1 for Dominican). These girls have access to less
than half the subjects in this category, and the less lucrative options too. Girls attending single-
sex schools have an aptitude for learning. Denying such girls a more expansive range of 
technical subjects limits the kinds of scientific and technological fields they can access 
particularly as the job market becomes more sciences and technology-oriented. In this respect, 
secondary education has failed. Here one can agree with Assie-Lumbumba (1999a) who 
argues that the problem of gender differentiation in education is the result of the gendered 
development of education and in particular the forced inclusion of women in formal education 
in most parts of Africa. When technical subjects are perceived as ‘soft’ and ‘hard’, the 
evidence points to divisions in the national curriculum (see Appendices M, N, O and P). These 
divisions are also gender-based and they fulfil societal expectations for men and women. In 
this study they confirm that girls’ education in Kenya is established on pedagogy of difference 
(see section 2.2.1.3). More importantly, however, this division reveals that the problem of 
female access to science and technology education is beyond the jurisdiction of individual 
schools. It demonstrates that the problem is deeply entrenched in the ways in which gender 
equity is constructed within symbolic and procedural education policies. This is drawn out of 
the fact that even single-sex schools appear unable to produce girls with a strong inclination 
towards the study of science and technology (see Appendices Q, R and S).

As indicated in Chapter 2, there are numerous challenges in education for females (see section 
2.2.1.1), however, this study shows that the problem of poor female representation in science 
and technology fields in higher education and the labour market stems from secondary school. 
The irony of the matter is that disinterest in science and technology occurs in three girls’ 
schools with good facilities and resources. Quite obviously the question that follows is ‘why?’

Much as the 8-4-4 system of education purports to promote gender equity and encourage 
female participation in science and technology education there is evidence of the cultural 
reproduction of gender among subjects on the national curriculum (see Appendix M). For this 
reason, Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican, cannot entirely be blamed for the trends in the 
schools as the cultural reproduction of gender in education thrives on power and privilege 
(Arnot and Weiner, 1987) which the 8-4-4 as an education structure has paid little attention to 
at the level of curriculum implementation in schools. Even where an education system 
purports to be gender equal, regulative policies that do not effect gender equity instead 
perpetuate gender differentiation through curriculum, as is the case here. The consequences of 
this is that girls have a poor head start in science and technology because the curriculum
creates a situation where they believe the subjects are male subjects, difficult subjects or even both.

Like Rharde (1997) and Kivuva (2004), I too urge for the revitalisation of the education system in Kenya. The quality and relevance of secondary education in Kenya is wanting but as Bennaars (1998:5) puts it nothing short of a “radical re-orientation” of the national secondary school curriculum will change the trend and create a science and technology education that is truly accessible to all.

8.3.1.2 Illuminating issues of curriculum implementation in individual schools
In previous section I have analysed the reason why ready access to science and technical subjects is problematic for girls even though the subjects are offered in schools. In this section, I examine how the size of a school impacts on the range of subjects that it can offer and what this means for girls attending school in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican.

The streaming of classes has long been identified as a cause of gender differentiation in science and technology (Gaskell, 1985:48). Streaming is peculiar to mixed sex schools but in this study shows that gender-related differences exist even in single-sex schools. While this might be contrary to the claims made about these schools, this study shows that the success of single-sex schools is not independent of an education system. This is especially true of public education where the curriculum in public secondary schools in Kenya is standardised. The size of a school (i.e. the number of classes it has) determines how many subjects can be offered in the school. This means that there are restrictions on the variety of subjects that a student can study, as has already been shown with applied and technical subjects.

In many instances, the advantages or disadvantages of school size and consequently subject variety is linked to the history of the school, its regional location, the quality of its facilities and resources. Among the 3,000 plus secondary schools in Kenya only 17 are national schools (RoK, 1988:15). These are large schools with four, five or even more streams and for this reason can offer between 17 and 23 subjects (see Appendix L). Few schools in Kenya offer such a broad range of subjects. Quite obviously students attending these few schools are greatly advantaged. There are few provincial schools that offer such a wide range of subjects. Yellowwood is a reasonably big school that can offer 19 different subjects on its curriculum but it only offers twelve electives in form three and four, which is where the benefits of
subject range matter (see Table 5.1). District schools are more complicated as many of them have Harambee school origins and characteristics, which among other things may include inadequate facilities and therefore only one or two streams. Schools with three streams can offer 17 subjects and those with two 15. Fort Hall offers 12 and Dominican 9 electives respectively (see Tables 6.1 and 7.1 respectively).

These patterns are circumstantial rather than preferential. The need to offer a foreign language was cited by teachers, students and even some parents in all the three schools. However, because there is little autonomy in as far as the introduction of new subjects is concerned, schools have to wait until they are instructed on the way forward. For schools like Dominican, expansion of subjects is an even slower process because of the size of the school and the restrictions that come with it.

The majority of Kenyan girls are enrolled in small schools (see section 2.3.2.1.1). In this connection, school size can be seen as discriminating against those that would benefit most from a wider variety of subjects. Few girls are able to access a secondary school education, as the statistics in Murang’a district show, and when they do, the chances to advance in the competitive world of higher education and careers is reduced because of the restricted opportunities afforded to them.

Finally, though physical facilities and human resources should determine what a school could offer in terms of its school curriculum, it is larger rather than smaller schools that are favoured when it comes to subject variety. Yellowwood, with its 4 streams (16 classes) is described in detail in Chapter 5 as an old established school that is competitive and attract students with high grades in KCPE (see section 5.2; 5.2.1). It is the only school of the 70 plus secondary schools in Murang’a district that offers Art and Design and also the only one in this study that offers Music. This is an advantage that girls in Fort Hall with 3 streams (12 classes) and Dominican with 2 streams (8 classes) would benefit more from because the subjects are practical subjects and they fit in well with the talent and creative abilities of the girls in these two schools. However, this advantage cannot be extended to these schools because of their size. In Dominican only two subjects can be offered in the Applied and Technical subject category, which is where Art and Design falls. Music falls in the Culture/Foreign Languages category and these two schools can only offer two subjects in this category. Fort Hall offers Commerce and Typing with Office Practice while Dominican offers Commerce alone.
Yellowwood offers Commerce, Typing with Office Practice and Music, an indication of the advantage of size.

While it can be argued that the categorisation of school subjects limits educational options for girls it is also important to note that schools the size of Dominican restrict girls to ‘traditional’ school subjects. Except for Computer Studies, a subject that was introduced in the school at the time of my fieldwork, the girls in this school have only Commerce in the Cultural/Foreign Languages category (see Appendix S). Ironically, in this school where a wider selection of subjects would be beneficial to those who do not feel particularly inclined to ‘academic’ subjects, much less have the aptitude for them (see Appendices I, J and K) relevant practical and subjects are denied.

In conclusion, the foregoing section points to the weakness in liberal feminist assumptions on gender equality in education. Underlying the national secondary school curriculum is the assumption that access to ‘core’ subjects (Mathematics, English, Kiswahili) and options among science, humanity, applied/technical and cultural/foreign languages will provide some form of equity. But as the study has shown, there can be access but at the same time unequalness. The core subjects and the two science subjects offered in each school (see Tables 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2) are taken because they are mandatory. Despite awareness of their importance girls avoid them where they can. A case in point is Dominican where no girl has taken Physics in the last three years (1999 to 2001) (see Appendix S). The lack of interest in the subject in other girls’ schools in the district (see Appendix P) confirms that science subjects are perceived as masculine. Girls reject the subject if they feel that it tacitly forces masculine values on them (Volman, Eck and Dam, 1995; Wienburg, 1995), as appears to be the case with Physics in Dominican. This finding agrees with a study of the images of science among Norwegian girls (see Sjøberg, 1989) and it explains why the majority of girls in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominicans gravitate towards Biology and career preferences in the biological sciences. It is especially important to note that even good students construe Physics as masculine (see section 5.3.3.1) and a subject that that is best avoided as soon as it becomes possible in FIII. The pattern that is demonstrated here confirms the observations of Brickhouse, Lowery and Schultz (2000:441) who state that “girls take science courses that are required of them, they rarely choose those that are not required.”
Finally, despite the privilege of a single-sex school, there is evidence that these schools are unequal. A ‘broad’ and ‘lean’ curriculum differentiates Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican making it difficult to refer to single-sex schools as providers of equal educational opportunity. The evidence is that single-sex schools simply replicate the partialities that are contained in the national secondary school curriculum. It is a curriculum where gender differences are marked, however it is also one where the small size of a school further disadvantages girls.

In conclusion, it is critical that I point out that the purpose of single-sex girls’ schools in Kenya is, among other things, to expose girls to a wide array of education opportunities of an academic and non-academic nature so that they are elevated beyond the gender stereotypes common in mixed sex schools. The three schools demonstrate that this occurs in very different ways and has consequences on the value and relevance that girls attach to school subjects.

8.3.2 VALUE AND RELEVANCE OF SCHOOL SUBJECTS

Globally, countries that have advanced and developed industrialised economies lay emphasis on science and technology in education from primary school. In Kenya, emphasis on science and technology education exists in policy but in the execution, as the previous sections show, the study of science and technology subjects in secondary education are marginal. The quality of education output and outcomes in these critical subjects is also low (see Appendices O, Q, R and S). Industrialised economies, such as the one that Kenya envisages to develop by 2020, are science and technology based. The creation of such economies requires a shift in the focus of education that includes a value and relevance for science and technology subjects at the school level.

In my attempt to understand how girls’ perceive their purpose for education, I explore the ways that they identify themselves with subjects in the national school curriculum. I also identify the value and relevance they attach to particular school subjects and finally I explore the possible implications with respect to higher education and future careers.

Subjects in the national secondary school curriculum are in categories and the study of one or more subjects from each category is a requirement. Since the study of all electives taken in form three begins in form one, there is engagement with a subject that results in perceptions and attitudes about the subject. This I refer to as ‘subject identity’ coined from my reading of
“school science identities” (Brickhouse, Lowery and Schultz, 2000:441). The authors argue that a school science identity is developed through a student’s engagement with school science and the resultant view that a student draws of himself as a consequence of the engagement. Subject identities are created as a consequence of experiences within and out of school. The study shows that students identify themselves differently with languages, science, humanities and applied science/technical subjects. Some identities are positive; others negative, others a convoluted mix of both.

Two of the core subjects are English and Kiswahili. The latter is a local language that is widely spoken in Kenya while the former is the official language in Kenya. In all three schools, students identified positively with both languages. There is higher regard for English than Kiswahili (see Tables 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2), perhaps because English is the medium of instruction across all subjects in secondary school. In fact, in Fort Hall and Dominican it is the most important subject among all subject studied in form three and four. This positive attitude and value for the subject agrees with Francis (2000) and Archer and Macrae (1991) who have observed that girls are positively inclined towards the learning of languages. It is likely that this positive identification is responsible for the high grades in language subjects in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican (see Appendices Q, R and S) and nationally in the KCSE (Nation Reporter, 2004).

Mathematics is the third of the core subjects. It is a subject that is stereotyped as male domain (Walkerdine, 1998) but this is somewhat challenged in this study. Traditional reasons advanced for poor achievement in mathematics are cognitive differences, environmental differences and assessment methods. Modern studies show that these are all environmental issues that are built around the argument that the powers of rationality and mathematical thinking are masculine (Walkerdine, 1998). When this argument is bound up in the cultural definition of masculinity then girls are more then likely to respond negatively to mathematics. It is noteworthy therefore to find that this argument is rejected in Yellowwood. From their perceptions of subjects, the girls in this school identify positively with mathematics and value it more than English and Kiswahili. Mathematics is perceived as more than just an important subject; it is the second favourite subject on the curriculum after Biology. It is a subject that has value and relevance to the girls in this school (see Table 5.2 for details). It is also a subject that many link their future interests to, particularly those with interest in careers related to science and technology (see section 5.3.3.2).
The converse is the case in Fort Hall and Dominican. Girls in these two schools hate mathematics (see Tables 6.2 and 7.2 and sections 6.5.4 and 7.3.3.2) because the ideology that mathematics is masculine is yet to be challenged. Although mathematics is conceived as a boy’s subject and is responsible for maths anxiety in these schools, the anxiety is further reinforced by gendered classroom experiences, which emanate from gender biased teachers and the subsequent lack of confidence in these teachers (see section 6.5.4).

On the periphery these case studies appear to contradict the notion that science subjects connote dismal performance and negative attitudes among female students. This is because in all three schools, all girls study three science subjects in form one and two and two in form three and four (see Tables 5.1, 6.1, 7.1). This exposure is perceived as able to diminish negative perceptions more so because the three schools are single-sex (these arguments are advanced by Ndunda and Munby, 1991; Colley and Combar, 1994; Norton and Rennie, 1998; Wong, Lam and Ho, 2002) but this is not the case. Although negative perceptions abound towards science subjects, and in particular Physics, they occur in a more convoluted form than the tables show (see Table 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2). While there is outright disregard for the science subjects, there is at the same time recognition of their importance and even an acceptance that future careers hinge on them. This recognition is unique in Yellowwood: girls in this school know that science subjects are important to the science and technology careers they aspire for. There is even an attempt to create a more positive attitude in the school by creating time for the study of these subjects through the deduction of examinable subjects to the bare minimum (see 5.4.4.3).

The case is different in Dominican. Girls have similar recognition, but there are girls some who cannot make a correlation between specific subjects and careers. It is illogical that there can be girls who hold negative attitudes to subjects that are critical to the medical science careers they aspire to (see section 7.3.3.4). This pattern is similar to that found in Fort Hall where some girls fail to recognise that negative perceptions of Mathematics cannot yield the accounting careers they aspire (see section 6.4.4).

While it is a step in the right direction to make the study of science subjects mandatory, it is presumptuous to assume that forcing girls to study of two science subjects in form three and four will enhance female participation and interest in science and technology. The study
shows that, even in single-sex schools, access to science subjects does not yield matching results. Just because girls are exposed to three science subjects in form one and two does not guarantee that they will continue with all three in form three and four.

Instead, the study reveals that the kind of school a girl attends determines how she positions herself with regard to mathematics and science subjects. For science subjects, there are certain identities that girls construct of school subjects and they are embedded in the school culture. Brickhouse, Lowery and Schultz, (2000:441) refer to them as “school science identities”. None of the three schools has a thriving culture of mathematics and science learning but as already shown, there is an attempt to create one in Yellowwood.

The subject identities that girls formulate, especially of science subjects, are of critical importance because of the perceptions around science.

Since individual schools are mandated to decide what subjects to offer on the basis of resources and teacher availability, when it comes to subject electives, schools tend to favour subjects that will earn students high grades. This is the case with science electives. The three schools offer Biology, Chemistry and Physics, and in form three students decide for themselves which science subject to take, however, the choices show that there are biases. In the three schools, there is preference for Chemistry and Biology over Physics (see Appendix N). Chemistry is compulsory for all students in Yellowwood and Biology in Fort Hall and Dominican. This internal arrangement clearly favours Biology, which is perceived as less technicist. In Fort Hall, girls find it accessible because it does not have many calculations and they easily link with everyday health issues so they see its relevance (see 6.5.4).

Physics is considered the worst subject by a large percentage of girls in all three schools Yellowwood (14.8%), Fort Hall (15.8%) and Dominican (29.3%). This negative perception corresponds with the low participation: few students take it as an elective. In Yellowwood, only 97 out of 367 (26%) take it and in Dominican, 34 of 152 (22%), which is less than a quarter of the two forms. Enrolment is worse in Fort Hall with only 41 out of 254 (16%) taking the subject. The few girls that take Physics also happen to be among the few girls that take three science subjects (see Appendix N). The low level of participation in the subject shows that the subject is not valued in the three schools and it confirms earlier studies, which found females to have particularly negative attitudes towards Physics (Kelly, 1984).
Nonetheless, there are still unresolved contradictions with the science subjects, if consideration is given to the fact that these are single-sex schools.

Yellowwood has the status of leading girls’ school (see section 3.5.2). Girls in this school have a positive perception of mathematics (see Table 5.2) and since mathematics is crucial to learning Physics then why are they unable to build a positive subject identity around Physics?

The answer to this is partly explained in the ways that science identities become built. Girls have to be more receptive to science before they can build an identity and this is not the case with Physics. In Dominican there has been resistance to the subject for three years. The KCSE examination results for 1999 to 2001 show that no girl took Physics beyond form two (see Appendix S). In Yellowwood where there is an attempt to build positive science identities, there are relatively many girls who long to drop the subject. As one of the teachers explains, “… there has been a problem of attitude because it is the one subject that students drop out of their own free will at the end of FII … FII can be a very frustrating experience for a teacher of Physics because these students minds are made up … I do not think I can fault the teachers on this.”

Generally speaking, the study of Physics in the three schools illustrates that it is one area where the mandatory study of three science subjects in forms one and two has failed to achieve its goal of changing perceptions and sensitising girls to the value and relevance of Physics irrespective of the fact that it might be technicist. Having said that, there are positive ways in which girls identify with Science and Mathematics in Yellowwood. This can be attributed to their teachers and their involvement in the SMASSE project which is housed in Yellowwood (see 5.2.1). It is likely that the in-service training that teachers receive periodically has had a constructive impact on their teaching methods and attitudes. It is more than likely that the same project is responsible for the positive ways that girls in this school identify with mathematics. Gillibrand, et al., (1999) argue that a conducive environment can be created enabling girls to participate more in science and mathematics lessons. This appears to be the case in Yellowwood.

The value and relevance of subjects in the applied science/technical category is different from that of science subjects because few of the eleven subjects is this category are available to girls in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican and those that are, as I have indicated in the
previous section are, ‘soft’. This fact notwithstanding, there is variation in the way that girls perceive the subjects available in the three schools, namely Home Science, Agriculture, Art and Design and Computer Science.

With regard to value and relevance, Home Science is a dying subject in all three schools (see section 5.3.3.1). Participation was found to be low (see Tables 5.1, 6.1 and 7.1), and interest in the subject was also found to be low, particularly in Yellowwood where it is hardly a favourite subject (2.2%) rather than the worst subject (7.1%) and second after Physics (see Table 6.2). Home Science is a practical subject that has been part of school curriculum ever since the introduction of formal education in Kenya (see 2.2.1.2). It is, understandably, conceived as a female subject.

As a practical subject, Home Science is expensive but it is offered in all the girls’ schools in Murang’a district because it is perceived as equipping girls with important skills. In Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican there is evidence of heavy investment in the subject with regard to facilities and equipment (see section 5.2.1; 6.4.1; 7.2.1). But girls no longer find the subject relevant because of its demanding practical projects that span over a year (see sections 5.4.3.1; 6.5.4). Clearly, the strong point about the subject is rejected. The national school curriculum envisages that the practical skills taught in Home Science can lead to self-employment, is a key goal of the 8-4-4 system of education but the means by which it can be achieved are clearly not well understood in secondary school.

Like Home Science, Agriculture is another practical subject whose purpose is to lead to skill equipping and even self-employment. Like Home Science, participation is low (see Tables 5.1, 6.1 and 7.1). Perception towards the subject is poor. It is not highly rated as a favourite subject in the three schools (see Tables 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2).

Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are rural schools and so the subject Agriculture is more than likely to be associated with farming. Unlike like nursing or teaching, farming is lodged in the realities of rural life and for this reason it is not perceived as a profession that requires education and training, like nursing or teaching. Agriculture is a subject that relates to commercial agriculture and in the experiences of rural girls women’s lived experience of Agriculture is small-scale crop production for family food. It is probable that girls fail to reconcile the value of agriculture as a subject and the low economic returns that characterise
the reality they see in subsistence farming. The blame for this trend is attributed to the government which, according to Mr K the teacher of the subject in Dominican, “seems to have denied the subject many opportunities when it comes to careers.”

Art and Design is only offered in Yellowwood. Very few students take the subject and while there is no indication of its value (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2), a background in Art and Design affords one competitive opportunities in the job market. This is information that is known to students in Dominican, and the reason why they would like to have the subject offered in their school (see section 7.3.3.3).

Computer Studies, as has been indicated in the case study chapters is a new subject in the national secondary school curriculum. It is a subject that has both value and relevant to the goals of education under the 8-4-4 system of education because it addresses the need for skills in technology. It is also a subject that requires attitude change in terms of gender.

In this study, only Fort Hall has offered Computer Studies at the level of the KCSE (see tables 5.2, 6.2; 7.2 and Appendices Q, R and S). However, its value and relevance commands mixed perceptions. In Fort Hall there is ownership of the subject and even competition to join to small Computer Studies class. In Dominican, the converse is the case: it is perceived as a hard science subject primarily because of the gender-biased attitude in the teacher of the subject (see section 7.4.2.1). In Yellowwood, there was massive interest in the subject following the orientation classes indicating that girl find value and relevance in the subject.

The subjects Music, Commerce and Typing with Office Practice all fall under the Culture and Foreign Languages category. Like Art and Design, Music is offered only in Yellowwood and the issues of value and relevance more or less compare. In particular, girls in Dominican find value and relevance in Music and would like to have it offered in their school because of the opportunities it affords (see section 7.3.3.3).

Commerce and Typing with Office Practice are odd subjects in this category. Participation is high in all three schools suggesting a high value for the subject (see Tables 5.1, 6.1 and 7.1). Commerce is a business subject and the choice of business-related careers suggests that girls find relevance for the subject (see section 5.3.3.2; 6.4.4; 7.3.3.4.1.).
As computer technology in secondary education becomes a reality through the introduction of Computer Studies, Typing with Office Practice appears to be losing value and relevance. It is soon to be obsolete especially in Yellowwood where participation is very low (see Table 5.1). The introduction of Computer Studies is inevitable but the slow demise of this subject is an indication of the importance of subject relevance within a school curriculum. The dynamics of relevance sustain or eliminate a subject.

Finally, the last category of school subjects, the humanities, reveals interesting dynamics in as far as subject value and relevance is concerned. According to the Head of Science in Dominican “girls like humanities just like that.” These positive perceptions abound in all three schools, with History and Geography being the favourite subjects in all three schools. Nonetheless, History and CRE do not have a high participation as compared to Geography where more than half of the entire FIII and FIV take the subject (see tables 5.1, 6.1 and 7.1). What appears as a display of apathy toward CRE is in fact an issue of subject relevance. Few careers are linked to CRE, which partly explains why girls in Yellowwood have lost interest in the subject. However, it is equally important to note that in Yellowwood there are more subject options to choose from, which is probably the reason why many of them drop CRE at the end of FII. In Dominican the choices are fewer, which makes CRE a necessity rather than an option. In Fort Hall the problem with CRE appears to be less acute as the preference spreads almost equally among History, CRE and SEE. However, participation is much higher for SEE (37%) than it is for History (15%) or CRE (17%). The reason for this is found in examination performance: the mean average grade for SEE in KCSE has been higher and consistent for three years (see Appendix R), which makes the subject a more attractive option.

Another reason for the preference of Geography is that the subject combines well with science subjects. It is relevant to both science and humanities and so it offers students a wider choice of courses in higher education, which is not the case with History and CRE. It is notable that little importance is attached to CRE both in Yellowwood and Fort Hall (see Tables 5.2 and 6.2). It is a subject that seems threatened with ‘extinction’ and it hardly surprising that it is described a ‘dying subject’ by a CRE teacher in Yellowwood.

Finally, as regards the value of subjects in the humanities, it is important that girls are also endeared towards the humanities for survival. The majority of girls take an extra subject in this category instead of the third science subject (which under the 8-4-4 system is more
encouraged) because of the contribution these subjects add to the quality of examination performance (see Appendices Q, R and S). Taking a subject in the humanities is a strategy that compensates for areas where performance is likely to be poor, like the sciences. Such a subject is ‘stabilising’ as it safeguards the quality of overall mean grade, which in the Kenyan education system is critical because the aggregate or mean grade is the criterion used to admit students to tertiary education:

… we have this other very large group, which will take subjects simply that will enable them to land in public university … if it is CRE that will make them pass and will not necessarily lead to any career, they would rather go for that CRE so that they go to the next level of learning. Maybe with the hope that when they go there they have a degree of some kind and things will simply sort themselves out and it is this large group I fear for … they want to do everything they can to go to public universities (Dean of Students, Yellowwood).

While it is important to point out that the discussion on the value and relevance of school subjects is specific to three girls’ schools, the strategies that girls’ employ illustrate the extent to which the meritocratic education system affects girls’ subject choices. It is a finding that may resonate with girls’ education elsewhere in Kenya as it reveals the shortcomings in single-sex girls’ schools, despite the portrayal of such schools as providing equal education opportunities. This finding demonstrates that while opportunities might be equal on paper, in practice the curriculum is not girl-friendly in its entirety.

In conclusion, the decision to study a subject is personal, however, this section shows that the process of choice-making can be enhanced or worsened by factors that are beyond individual preferences. The relevance and value of a subject is also sought after in this process and as the as the science subjects demonstrate the attributes associated with single-sex schools may or may not have influence.

8.4 HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS AND FUTURE CAREERS

This section examines how girls visualise themselves and the factors leading to girls’ choices and preferences with regard to higher education and future careers. The section deliberates how girls make choices and, more importantly, whether their aspirations can become a reality.
8.4.1 THE IDEAL VERSUS REALITY

National access to secondary education is almost equal by gender (see Table 2.1), however, there are regional disparities. In Murang’a district females take the lead in enrolment and the reason for this that there is investment in single-sex girls’ schools. There are 11 such schools in the district and all have two or more streams per form creating for girls an environment that is stable and conductive for the completion of secondary education.

For many developing countries, a destabilised learning experience is one of the key problems working against the completion of education. According to Hutmacher and Cohrane and Bottani (2001) a destabilised learning experience contributes as much to inequalities of gender in education as the lack of school access. Since throughput in single-sex schools is high, girls who study in single-sex schools should command high levels of learning by gender (education output) and high job status or level of income (education outcome).

National indicators on gender parity in education output and outcomes do not match enrolment, which is almost equal as far as gender is concerned. The evidence in Table 8.1 below shows that female enrolment in degree courses in public universities is low and science and technology courses have particularly badly low enrolment. This same pattern is replicated in employment (see section 2.3.2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>% per programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>37,932</td>
<td>19,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>37,488</td>
<td>11,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science</td>
<td>15,037</td>
<td>2,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine</td>
<td>12,875</td>
<td>1,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Architecture</td>
<td>7,974</td>
<td>1,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine and Pharmacy</td>
<td>3,416</td>
<td>837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>114,722</td>
<td>37,018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Figures generated from the 2002 Universities Joint Admission Board Records
A similar trend emerges in the three schools even though there is evidence of keen interest in university education and science-related careers. The majority of girls in Yellowwood (96.2%), Fort Hall (78.1%), and Dominican (68.9%) hold aspirations for university education (see section 5.3.3; 6.4.2; 7.3.3.2) and they also desire to develop careers. The dominant ones are in the biological sciences: medical health [medicine 28.5% (105); nursing 11.3% (42); pharmacy 4.6% (17)]. Other career aspirations are in business [law 12.6% (47); accounting 7.8% (29); journalism 2.7% (10); business management 2.1% (8)], science and technology [engineering 7.8% (29)], and the service industry [airhostess 2.7% (10); hotel management 1.9% (7)]. These preferences confirm that girls consider a university education and a career as an important outcome of secondary education (see details in 5.3.3.2; 6.4.4; 7.3.3.4). It is also a confirmation of the literature, which states that girls attending single-sex schools are ambitious (see section 3.5.2).

All the same, judging from national trends (see Table 8.1) and the university admission patterns in each of the three schools (see Appendix T), it is more than likely that many of these aspirations will fail to become a reality. There are two reasons for this: the interplay of the education system on higher education and careers, and the interplay of this education system and individual choice and preference.

With regard to the interplay of the education system on higher education and careers it is important to review secondary education through the lens of Education For All and the interventions that the Kenyan government has undertaken to facilitate ‘equal rights to education’ (RoK, 2005).

In Chapter 2 and 3 I discussed at length the 1990 Jomtein Declaration on Education For All and its focus on basic education by 2005, which in Kenya became realised in 2002 as free primary education (FPE). This intervention attends to social issues that hinder the attainment of social and education equity. In particular, free primary education has had phenomenal impact on primary education in Kenya (UNESCO, 2004). It has helped to mitigate the negative impact of social cultural deterrents improving female access to primary education. FPE is a practical intervention, a “material feminism” (Weiner, 1994:21), and is the point at which theory becomes practice and is able to advance education equity. It is an attainment
that has become possible primarily because Kenya is a signatory to the Jomtein Declaration and education equity in primary education is a basic target goal.

Other practical interventions include the affirmative action mandate, which enables females to gain admission to public universities on points that are slightly below the cut-off entry requirement. Under this mandate, girls who drop out of primary and secondary schools due to pregnancy can complete their education.

The reality about these interventions is that they mitigate female access and survival but pay little attention to education output and outcomes. FPE, for instance has no meaningful contribution to secondary education or even higher education because both are fee-paying levels and so transition from primary to secondary education is low. Even with national indicators showing a closing gender gap, it is important to note that less than 50% of those who take primary education do not proceed to secondary school (UNESCO, 2002). The impact of social, economic and cultural deterrents on female education do not lessen just because girls have made the transition to secondary school, the impact just shifts from school access to the quality of female education output and outcomes.

The lowering of the cut-off points for females does not increase female enrolment in universities either much less the enrolment of females in competitive courses. Viewed this way, one begins to see why higher education and career aspirations remain an ideal rather than becoming a reality.

This study reveals that in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican the branding of school combined with the categorisation of subjects on the school curriculum impact on accessibility contributing to the educational experiences which result in low education output and outcomes. The study also shows that the legacy of female underrepresentation in higher education and the labour market has an impact on the quality of girls’ education output and outcomes.

Education is associated with the acquisition of social status, social influence and economic returns. The collective belief among girls who aspire to pursue a university education is that it will reward them with jobs, prestige, financial security and social standing. Yellowwood has a legacy of consistent university admission compared to Fort Hall and Dominican and
perhaps that is why it has a high percentage of girls (96.2%) who consider university education to be a natural next step after secondary education. However, if consideration is given to the position Yellowwood as a leading girls' school in the province, it could be argued that the translation of higher education aspirations into reality is low. While opportunities within the fields of science, engineering and technology might be limited because the national curriculum has only a few selected technical subjects available for girls: the case is not the same for science subjects. In this regard, Yellowwood has failed to maintain an attraction to science subjects. Rather than readily seizing them as available opportunities, the girls tend to study science subjects because they must. This should not be the case for a school of such standing.

The second reason that can be used to explain why higher education and career aspirations are likely to remain an ideal rather than reality is found in the interplay among education system, individual preference and the social context.

University education is the peak of academic achievement within the Kenyan education system. But it is not the choice for all girls. In Dominican and Fort Hall college education is perceived as a more pragmatic choice because of the unnecessary competition and unemployment that characterises university education. Girls in Dominican even expressed an obligation to remain in rural areas and a concern that one uses education to make a contribution to the community. For this minority group, university education is perceived as elitist and unable to generate the practical skills that improve social welfare (see section 7.4.3).

The aspirations that girls in this study show for higher education careers tend to remain an ideal because patriarchy, power and social class militate against female entry into university.

In all the case studies there is evidence that patriarchal practices constitute the social culture in which girls are brought up. Oppressive patriarchal practices tend to a collective experience for women of African descent; they undermine progress towards empowerment and emancipation and in particular interfere with girls’ education (see section 3.4.3). Given this general background then Central Province is unique.
The attainment of gender parity in Central Province is an indication that there is awareness of the need to take the girl child to school has taken root. In Murang’a District, there is some a hint that wider society still views girls as second class citizens (see section 5.4.1.1). Patriarchal practices structure a social stratification which is responsible for social conditioning that females are the weaker sex even within education. The study found that parents operated under this conditioning; some used gendered lenses to make distinctions between their children through speech and action that is gender-biased (see section 5.4.4.2). By so doing parents create the boundaries that encourage girls to aspire for much, in this case university degrees and careers in medical sciences but to work towards little, the reality being that girls take to marriage immediately after FIV and abandon higher education and career aspirations.

Also related to the aforementioned social conditioning is a subtle denigration of girls’ academic abilities. In the three schools it is perpetuated by the teachers some of whom uphold the biased attitude that girls’ intellectual ability and drive is inferior to that of boys (see section 5.4.4.2; 5.4.4.3; 6.5.4; 7.3.3.2; 7.4.2.1). A similar attitude prevails among a few parents too (5.4.4.2; 7.4.3.2.4). For these parents there is even further irony in that they care to invest in their daughter’s education but still hold the belief that only sons can yield high returns from education. This illustrates the contradictions that arise from social conditioning. In Fort Hall and Dominican, the high rate of marriage among students almost immediately after they complete FIV suggest that this gendered social conditioning has a powerful impact on their education aspirations. For many of these girls university education remains an ideal.

The impact of power and social class on higher education has emerged with the liberalisation of university education in Kenya. Following the introduction of parallel degree programmes in public universities, admission on merit appears to be less important as a basis for university admission. With the subsequent increase of privately sponsored students in public universities there an emerging discourse that is propagated by social class. In all three schools, girls are aware that they can secure university admission through alternative programmers besides the competitive public selection criterion. There are three options available, namely study through the parallel degree programme in public universities, study in private universities or study overseas. Following the popularity of the parallel degree programme and private universities, there is an emerging discourse in higher education that is a point of connection between higher education and social class. For some students the
availability of alternatives is an advantage given that competition for university education, however, for others the parallel degree programme carries no prestige (see Yellowwood 5.4.4.4 and Fort Hall 6.5.4.1) because with this programme anyone who can afford the cost can study at the university. However, it is important to take cognisance of the impact that diversification of degree programmes in public universities is likely to have in the near future. While is likely to improve female access to university education, the reality of the matter is that where entry requirements are not met, it is girls from well-to-do homes who will be advantaged.

The ideal is that prestige and quality are maintained but the reality is the alternative routes to university education operate on a pressing need for improved access. Does this then mean that females will equal males in terms of numbers? I think not, because even though a concerted effort is made to improve the quality of female output at FIV, the dynamics of social class will continue to prevail for as long as the diversification of university education in Kenya encourages self-sponsorship.

Besides an emerging role in higher education, there is also a link between social class and power and the vision that girls hold of themselves.

8.4.1.1 Vision of self with regard to education

Generally speaking single-sex schools admit students with better KCPE grades compared than those admitted to mixed sex schools (see section 2.3.2.1.1). Even though this is has been challenged by Lee, Marks and Byrd (1994), unlike mixed sex schools, single-sex schools enable girls to break away from the stereotypes that hold them back in their societies. For this reason, high quality education output is one of key expectations from girls attending single-sex schools. This is the case in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican where girls are clearly aware of the privileges and expectations of single-sex school education (see sections 5.4.4.1; 6.5.4 and 7.4.1.2).

The expectations as already shown in the case study chapters include high educational and career aspirations (see section 5.3.3; 6.4.2; 7.3.3.2). Although the study has shown that the majority of girls do not realise their highest educational potential, that is, university education, the majority complete secondary education, which is an indication that the three schools have nurtured sufficient self-esteem in girls for them to complete this level of education
uninterrupted. The completion of secondary education is also an indication that the basic ideals of education equity, which are to access and survive an education cycle, are highly affected in spite of the disadvantages associated with rural education (see section 3.4). There is indication of a vision and value for girls’ education in the three schools but there is also the issue of the quality of education output.

There are three things noted in this study as shaping the vision of self which ultimately leads to the quality of education output and outcomes, which as I have indicated in the previous section is low for schools like Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican. The two key factors that were found to drive this vision are role models and significant others, and social and cultural milieu.

Girls’ vision of self is shaped by the schooling experiences they undergo in the schools they attend. Historically, girls’ education in Kenya developed late, and also embedded in context where there has been poor treatment of gender in education policies (2.3.1). As a consequence of this there is a marked hierarchy among girls’ schools (2.2.1.3). Schools established before independence tend to be more prestigious than those created under the Harambee school era (2.3.2.1.1). In this study, it is found that girls attending Dominican and Fort Hall tend to feel inferior to their counterparts in Yellowwood. Some girls in Dominican link their academic inabilities with the kind of school they attend. Their inability to accept is characterised by an unsettledness about the school and the teachers and listless striving (see section 7.4.2.1).

Linked to the perception and confidence that girls have of their school, there is also the attitude of teachers and peers. According to the literature (see for example Schneider and Coutts 1982) the social organisation of single sex schools allows for teachers to concentrate on the social and developmental issues that concern a particular gender. The advantage of this is that teachers can create conducive learning environments. This study found that while environment shapes girls’ vision of self, the kind of environment that teachers create through their treatment and attitude towards girls establish a positive or negative sense of self. This is a clearly distinguishable difference in the three schools.

Girls in Yellowwood were found to have confidence and trust in their teachers, in contrast to Dominican and Fort Hall where the girls appeared not to have such a high level of confidence
even though they are shown to appreciate the high qualifications that their teachers have and the support they receive from them (see section 5.3.2.3; 6.4.1.2; 7.3.3.1.2).

With regard to subject choices, higher education and career aspirations, there is evidence of varying degrees of confidence among girls. While these differences can be attributed to the different ethos and cultures found in each school, teachers evidently impact on the vision that girls have of themselves.

The impact of peers influence on the vision of self is very strong in the three schools. It is extremely powerful in the FI and FII and is responsible for the perception girls have of science as a male subject (see section 5.3.3.1; 6.5.4; 7.3.3.3). In Fort Hall it is responsible for the abrasive classroom culture that is hidden from teachers and the ganging up of the ‘royals’ as opposed to the ‘villagers’. The influence peers have upon education choices is widely documented in literature on girls’ education and this particular study confirms that peer influence thrives in single-sex schools: the peers influence perceptions and attitudes especially in junior secondary. The literature (see section 3.5.1) argues that the absence of male competitors enables girls to channel their energies towards building their abilities and strengths but this study has shown that girls have a gender bias towards some school subjects, which means that single sex schooling does not necessarily serve as an advantage.

This study found that the vision of self is built on multiple factors which are interlinked. There is a sense of self which is different and varied in each school. In Yellowwood there are girls who readily challenge the status quo while in Dominican and Fort Hall there are others who are subsumed by it. Second, there are role models and significant others and third, schooling experiences. The two factors are bound in a context whose social and cultural milieu is a mix of modern and traditional values and beliefs which is a source of conflict in girls’ sense of self.

Contemporary boarding schools as already discussed in Chapter 3 (see section 3.5.1), nurture independence. However, this study has shown that a boarding school experience makes little difference to girl’s sense of self or even their vision of self with regard to their education. The schools they attend, the influence of role models and significant others and the social context within which the two factors are lodged appear to shape the vision of self more.
Teachers, peers, family members and important personalities make up the key players in the construction of a girls vision of self. However, even as they wield influence on girls’ vision of self it is important to point out that the social and cultural milieu that impacts on rural secondary school education is different from that in city schools. The impact of social culture is even more strongly experienced when homes are rural, as is the case with the majority of the girls in the study.

In as far as the contribution of others is concerned, many of the girls are born, bred and schooled in an environment with little exposure to female professionals except for teachers and nurses. Rural women tend to have little education, in addition they engage primarily in subsistence farming activities and so they offer girls little in terms of job and career options. This kind of environment puts restrictions of the kind of vision that a girl can nurture or even dream for herself. When the broader community is unable to offer girls more, traditional values and beliefs around what women can and cannot do tend to be upheld. The single-sex organization of the three schools appears powerless in this regard because the study shows that patriarchal values are upheld without much challenge from the girls themselves, from their teachers or even from parents. The notions that ‘science is for boys’ and that ‘well-behaved girls are good girls’ are entrenched in the beliefs that both girls and teachers have about girls in the three schools. The former is seen to shape their subject preferences while the latter is essentially timidity, which perpetuates unassertiveness among girls. In all three schools timidity is wrought with contradiction because on the one hand, well-behaved girls are good to teach but on the other hand timidity puts limitations on the way that girls think about themselves. The two notions thrive because schooling and education in Kenya has yet to challenge the status quo, that is, the patriarchal value system. In the three schools, it is evident that girls are inclined to fulfil societal expectations of them. It is under such circumstances that girls from a school like Fort Hall will forfeit the opportunities for further education and marry almost immediately after completing secondary school. These notions are mentioned in Chapter 3 (see section 3.3.3) as features of socialisation and gendering. In this case, they demonstrate that even though girls might have a vision for themselves, it is the environment that they are in that determines whether or not their vision will become reality.
8.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter consolidates the case study chapters. I bring under scrutiny the assumption that education opportunities become equal where gender parity has been achieved. I show in despite the existence of gender aware education policies and the achievement of gender parity in Murang’a district, girls’ schooling experiences in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are tainted by a social culture that posts contradictory messages. On the one hand, it encourages them to access school and to pursue education to the highest possible level. But on the other, it undermines the possibility for more girls to achieve their full educational potential because the culture and ethos in the three single-sex boarding schools is aligned to a social stratification where gendering remains largely unchallenged. To varying degrees, this is a factor that impacts on girls’ educational experiences, subject choices, higher education and career aspirations. It suggests that the inclusion of gender in key education policies has yet to have full impact. For now, the impact is at the level of access and survival. As far as education output and outcomes are concerned, the impact of gender equal education policies is yet to be seen, especially in the areas of curriculum, teacher training, and counselling and career guidance.
CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This study sought to establish what girls’ collective schooling experiences are and how these experiences shape their educational choices. The study was undertaken as a case study of three schools, namely Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican. The four questions that guided the study explored four aspects of schooling: girls’ schooling experiences, girls’ choices and preferences with respect to school subjects; higher education and career aspirations.

This last chapter summarises the study, draws conclusions from the study, analyses the strengths and limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research.

9.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The study is broadly motivated by the role and significance of education in improving the social and economic needs of women in developing countries. This study concurs with Stromquist (1998, 1999) that education is instrumental in women’s lives. It concurs with Schultz (1989b and 1993), Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1985) that private and social returns on education increase with the years of schooling. However, the study itself is not confined to the social returns of the years of schooling but to schooling experiences and educational choices among girls in single-sex secondary schools located in rural Murang’a district. Taken from this broad sense, it is argued that though longer years of schooling can add value to the quality of private and social returns, the quality of the schooling experiences and the quality of educational choice also matter.

The study has nine chapters whose summary is given below.

Chapter 1 is the introduction and layout of the study.

Chapter 2 contextualises the study; it situates girls’ education within broader gender, education and equity discourses. The chapter is able to trace the treatment and status of
gender in education policy from the eras of missionary education to post independence. The chapter reveals that until the eighties, key education policies showed little awareness in their treatment of gender. As the foundation chapter to this study, Chapter 2 underscores the importance of historicity in the study of gender and equality in education.

Chapter 3 is the theoretical framework. It interrogates the role and contribution of women in the political economy all the time showing how education equips women to participate and contribute and why therefore the equality of gender in education is necessary and not just in terms of numbers. I interrogate school enrolment statistics and argue that our understanding of the nature of inequalities afflicting girls is limited because gender parity is the focus of gender and education in Kenya. I argue that while there has been development and expansion in education the ways in which it has grown has been treated uncritically, the evidence of which can be found in construction and framing of gender in key education policy documents. It is a liberal feminist construction that has led to the uncritical assumption that increasing female school enrolment is all that is required for gender equity in education to be achieved.

In order to enable more critical interpretation of schooling experiences and educational choices I advocate for use of a much broader lenses. In this study, liberal, social and radical feminism theories are used to frame the interrogation into girls schooling experiences and educational choices for the substantive issues pertaining to education equity in contexts where female enrolment in secondary school is secured. The combination of the three provides for a robust framework of interrogation whereby experiences both in and out of school are captured and analysed for the ways in which they impact on girls’ educational choices.

Chapter 4 presents the interpretive methodological framework used in this study. Like I state in chapter four (see 4.3.1), girls’ schooling experiences and educational choices is familiar terrain in education research but Chapter 4 illustrates that there are multiple ways to create a better understanding of the complexities that compound girls in their schooling and choice making. Since the study is framed around ‘how’ and ‘what’ questions, Chapter 4 instructive in that it ‘demolishes’ the variables that show female education to be quantitatively impressive. By combining quantitative and qualitative data generating methods Chapter 4 critically analyses key gender equality indicators for the more substantive indications of education equity.
To facilitate such depth of study into girls’ education as a gendered phenomenon, I use the qualitative case study for a research design. Complementing this design are five data collection methods that explore and interrogate girls’ schooling experiences, subject, higher education and career choices.

The key methods are the descriptive survey, focus groups and one-on-one interviews and the supplementary ones document analysis and participant observation (see 4.5 for more details). As a research design, the case study also facilitates the combined use of quantitative and qualitative data, which is important to the goal of this study, which is to demonstrate that education opportunities are necessarily equal even where access to schooling is unproblematic.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 are the case study chapters. While they show the collective schooling experiences and educational choices of the form three and four girls in each school, they also provide analysis of selected individuals. This depth of this analysis, in particular is the strength of combining quantitative and qualitative data.

In as far as education output and outcomes are concerned, these chapters reveal that besides gender, the structure of education and experiences out of and within school are powerful factors in that they differentiate girls in terms of their educational preferences and choices. The chapters also confirm that many such differences are entrenched in inequalities with roots in genderised social stratification. More importantly, these chapters also reveal that inequalities that are rooted in genderised social stratification are unrelenting even among girls who are considered as advantaged because they receive their education in single-sex schools.

Chapter 8 is an incisive discussion of the findings. In this chapter, I show that while the differences girls’ education arises from gender related factors, there is also the interplay of political and social cultural dynamics. The evidence of is manifest as inconsistencies. At the macro level, government polices on education promote education equality and even place special emphasis on gender. But, in practice, educational institutions are not free from social and cultural ideologies. Every day social interactions and habits perpetuate gendered thinking and tendencies within schools. When such practices are a part of the beliefs and values upheld within a schooling system there is little difference whether or not the school is a single-sex school or not. It emerges n this study, that for as long as girls social experiences
are gendered, girls experiences of education are likely to be viewed through similar lenses. This study reveals that education in a single-sex school can make a difference on girls schooling experiences and educational choices, however, the degree to which a school does make a difference depends on the girls themselves and the stakeholders in girls’ education. Their understanding and perception of gender and education equality is an important conduit in the creation of equity. The study shows that it only through continued interrogation with gender that single-sex schooling can guarantee the removal of gender related inequalities within education to become the much needed conduit of education equality in rural areas.

Chapter 9 concludes the study and the section following highlights the conclusions of this study.

9.3 A SUMMARY OF THE CONCLUSIONS

9.3.1 GIRLS’ EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOLING

The development of education in Kenya has not been balanced in terms of gender and more especially at post primary levels. However, with the advent of Harambee secondary schools in the seventies and eighties there has been concerted effort towards education equity because from colonial times the growth and expansion in education has favoured boys’. While education statistics are the more visible manifestation of this imbalance, less apparent but equally important is girls experiences of schooling.

Generally speaking, single-sex girls respond to the to the need to provide girls with enhanced education and schooling experiences. In the Western world single-sex schools are private, but in Kenya there are single-sex schools within public education but it is important to note that even with government support for their creation Fort Hall and Dominican were community initiatives (Harambee schools) that the government merely took over when they became viable projects attracting interest (single-sex girls schools).

The study shows that Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican respond to the high demand for secondary education for females and provide what is perceived as a non-threatening schooling environment. The study goes on to show that because of these two reasons, Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican are perceived as providing girls with quality schooling experiences leading to quality educational choices. These perceptions affirm one of the strong points
advanced by proponents of single-sex education; that single-sex schools positively influence achievement (see Shaw, 1980; Tidball, 1980; Marsh, 1989; Riordan, 1990; Mael, 1998; Hamilton, 1985; Wong, Lam and Ho, 2002).

Since the study affirms that the three single-sex girls’ schools largely have positive bearing on girls’ schooling experiences, it is useful to summarise how well the three schools do it.

It does emerge that the social organisation of the three schools provides an enabling environment: one that is good enough for girls to complete their secondary education with minimal interruption. That alone, however, does not prove that Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican positively influence girls’ educational choices much less eventual academic achievements. The study shows that Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican maintain high retention rates and by so doing safeguard the survival of girls throughout the four years of secondary education. By so doing they prove that single-sex girls schools help curb access related disparities, which mainly affect females. The three schools operationalise the liberal feminist approach to education equity (Weiner, 1994: 54) and in effect, meet one of the most critical EFA targets under the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000a), which is to create access and sustain survival. All the same, beyond the fact that girls survive four years of secondary school, girls schooling experiences show that the real substance of education which is measurable in the quality of education output and outcomes is somewhat wanting for schools that are single-sex.

The study found that the categorisation of schools into national, provincial and district undermined their ability to maximize on the benefits of the all female social organisation. The girls in Dominican were constantly striving to accept that Dominican is a good girls’ school. Halfway into their secondary education, the form threes and fours appeared somewhat unsettled. This was not the case in Yellowwood, which they considered to be ‘a better school’.

Perhaps the most significant thing that emerges with regard to the categorisation of schools is that it leads to a certain kinds of school culture. This school culture leads to certain kinds of beliefs, which are supported by the academic abilities of the girls attending the schools, the families they come from, the attitude of the teachers and the academic history of the school.
Although the study shows that girls generally experience schooling positively, the much deeper felt confidences and beliefs vary and these are what girls feed on and translate into the attitudes and values that guide the decisions and choices that they have to make with regard to their education.

While the study shows that girls in all three schools enjoy the benefits of qualified and experienced teachers and reasonably good teaching and learning resources. For schools that serve a population of predominantly rural girls, it would be hoped that a single-sex education serves to expose girls and challenge them to resist the status quo and gender stereotypes. This is was not entirely the case because of context.

Few parents appear to involve themselves in the education of their daughters beyond what is necessary, primarily paying school fees and attending mandatory parents meetings. There is also evidence that girls lack female role models and are by and large uninspired by female teachers or their mothers even though they do hold them in high esteem because of the contribution they make to their lives. While it is clear that the rural location of the three schools is disadvantage in this regard, it is a factor that could be addressed through proper career guidance but is not.

All the same, compared to Dominican and Fort Hall, the girls in Yellowwood appear more attentive of what to accept and resist with respect to the values and beliefs that inform their schooling experiences and educational choices. For this particular group, the single-sex school environment was found to inspire girls into less stereotyped ideas of what they and cannot do. For this girls schooling in a single-sex schools is a beneficial and experience that is followed by outcomes. In this respect, the claims that a single-sex education enables girls to channel their focus to academic studies rings true (Riordan 2000; Stables, 1990; Lee and Bryk, 1986).

**9.3.2 SUBJECT PREFERENCES AND CHOICES**

This study found that while subject preferences and choices are personal, school culture is a key mediating factor in the choice of schools subjects.
Before concluding why and how choices and preferences are made, it is important to point out that while the national school curriculum implementation guideline tightly control the subjects offered in school, it is the responsibility of the individual school to expand its physical facilities so accommodate new subjects introduced in the national curriculum. The establishment of a Computer Science and Home Science rooms in Fort Hall and Yellowwood in is a demonstration of such this responsibly. Simply put, parents provide the kind of education they want for their children. While such initiatives are not new in Kenya (Cooksey, Court and Makau, 1994) there success depends on the economic well being of the community and how well informed the community is. This factor differentiates the three schools in as far as the study of Computer Studies in concerned. While it can be appreciated that facilities are there, they do not meet the demand there is for the study of the subject and so in Fort Hall for instance, competition is unnecessarily high in form three as only twenty places are on offer in the Computer Studies class.

Like Fort Hall, Dominican and Yellowwood as have drawbacks with this subjects. Dominican is generally squeezed and there is little indication because of the small size of the school and the limited resources that the parents can generate funds to create a modern laboratory for Computer Studies to replace the old classroom currently in use. While the situation in Yellowwood is better in that Computer Studies in housed in a new building, the completion of the facility had stalled at the time of fieldwork. The computers were not enough for the number of girls in the school (over 700). It is likely that places in the Computer Studies class in form three is as competitive as Fort Hall.

Computer Studies is a critical subject in this information age. It should be accessible to all in much the same way that languages and mathematics are but this is not the case in the three schools even though there is interest shown in the subject.

This study gives a lot of detail given to mathematics, science and technical subjects because it is a study on girls’ and also because of the significance of these subjects to industrialisation.

The study found that the mandatory study of three science subjects in FI and FII exposed girls to Biology, Chemistry and Physics but it had little impact on the study of Physics in FIII and IV. Few girls were found to study Physics in FIII and FIV even in Yellowwood, which is regarded in this study as the better of the three schools in terms of optimising the advantages of
single-sex schooling. The usual attitudes linked to girls and science subjects emerged. This was interesting to find because it contradicts the literature on single-sex girls’ schools, which lays claims to female interest and excellence in science subjects (see Ndunda and Munby 1991; Colley, et al 1994; Norton and Rennie, 1998; Wong, Lam, and Ho, 2002). All the same, the study does show that the majority of girls have keen interest and preference for Biology. I attribute this preference to the nature of the Biology. It is less abstract as compared to Physics, has little mathematics and is linkable to everyday issues such as nutrition and health.

With regard to mathematics and judging from the attitude in Yellowwood, there was an indication that single-sex education can have positive influence. Though peer pressure and negative attitudes towards mathematics and science prevail in all three schools, it emerged very clearly that female teachers who bother to teach science and mathematics well, attract girls to the subjects and are able to maintain their interest and change their attitudes. The study also found that in service training of science and mathematics teachers made a difference in the approach and attitude of these subject teachers. These findings simply indicate that it takes more than attending a single-sex girl’s school, for girls to show interest in science and mathematics because their socialisation into the subjects is still gendered.

9.3.3 GIRLS’ ASPIRATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The study confirms claims in the literature that girls attending single-sex schools have higher education aspirations, particularly university education (see Chapter 3 section 3.2).

Though the study does not pursue who proceeds where in terms of higher education, the projection that is made from previous performance in each of the schools is that the majority of those pursuing university education are likely to be from Yellowwood. Few if any will be from Dominican. Those that pursue university education will cluster around courses in the arts and humanities. The study also found that even a good single-sex school like Yellowwood has yet to make its mark on university education and in particular the study of science and technology related degrees.

For Fort Hall and Dominican, university education continues to be a dream that is yet to be actualised.
Besides individual and school related factors, the study found that girls lacked female role models to emulate and the harsh reality of unemployed graduates, brought on despair. The cost of university education also made university an unattractive option where it was desired. Though education in a single-sex school nurtures high educational aspirations, the pathway to their realisation is a difficult one because of personal ability, competition, socialisation and cost.

9.3.4 GIRLS’ CAREER ASPIRATIONS

As the case is with higher education aspirations, career aspirations among girls in the three schools are high. While the career preferences in the three schools suggest that the schools have managed to steer girls into considering careers in science. The choices show that girls are aware of what is prestigious and well paying but at the same time, the pattern of choice, which is somewhat, stereotyped to careers in medical health can be attributed to the placement of medicine within university admission in Kenya. Only the highest KCSE scorers secure places in medical school so a medical doctor is perceived as one enjoying prestige and good pay. Now, for rural schools this is not untypical because of the lack of role models. However, for girls’ schools, there is clear indication of a lack of information and guidance on careers. Entry into prestigious and well paying careers is social advantage attributed to girls attending single-sex schools (Jackson and Smith, 2000) but as far as this study shows, the three schools have not managed to live up to it.

In terms of potential outcomes, gendered socialisation, poor career guidance, lack of role models and even the cost of higher education are contributing factors to the stereotyped choices and eventual low educational outcomes in the three schools.

9.4 STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS & CHALLENGES

There is repeated emphasis throughout this study that the focus of education initiative and education polices across the sub Saharan African countries in primary education. As Kenya continues to advance towards universal primary education, secondary education is going to have to become the focus of attention in terms of access, retention, output and outcomes. In this study, there is the attempt to examine these four aspects within the context of schooling experiences and educational choices in single-sex girls’ schools. Much as single-schools might be considered advantaged within the Kenyan education context, the choice of single-
sex girls’ schools as a site of study illuminates what works and what does not within functioning schools. This is a strength of the study, in that it brings out the strengths, omissions and limitations of education polices and curriculum implementation guidelines. It manages to demonstrate the limitations that curriculum implementation guidelines have on subject choices particular and in particular the disadvantages for those attending small schools with low student enrolment. The study also draws attention to the fact that the study of science and technology subjects by girls is critical not only because of the need there is to increase female representation in science and technology in higher education and the job market, but also because of the governments plan for industrialisation by 2020 (RoK, 2004b). For this plan to thrive, women will have to be the majority in the study of science, technology and entrepreneurship.

The use of case studies that combine quantitative and qualitative data gathering methods enrich the scope and depth of the study making methodology a strength of the study. All the same, this choice has its limitations in terms of generalisations. The absence of comparison with boys schools somewhat weakens what can be concluded about gender patterns and trends. The non-random sample also does not allow for generalisability outside the three schools. However, if guided by Bassey’s (1999:54) “fuzzy generalisation” there are features that can allow other researchers to reflect on the commonalities of these three cases and their resonance to others. By so doing use case study research becomes used in a way that is practical to education. This approach also allows, for others to hypothesise from the findings for the purposes or further research on a large scale.

The greatest challenge in this study has been managing the enormous amount of data generated and the cohesively arguing through the ideas and views given by the multiple stakeholders in girls’ education. This challenge prevails even though the research paradigm used is created to bring out dimensionality.

The mark of scholarship within the interpretive research paradigm is to be grounded in the reality of the phenomena and to recognise that the social world is not value-free (Gibson, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While every attempt is made to construct this world and to bring out the realities of girls education through their contexts and voices, consolidating this from the multiple sources of data was the greatest challenge because even as these voices might be unique to particular girls in particular schools, they are in a collective sense, the
experiences of a much larger group of girls outside of the scope of this study. Being forced to conceding to the fact that the study represents Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican leave one with the feeling that business is unfinished. Nonetheless, I take this as a limitation of working within the interpretive paradigm.

9.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

From the outset, this study attempted to situate girls schooling experiences and educational choices within social and economic development discourses. The study envisages girls’ education as having outcomes, which in the long run result in private and social returns. For this reason, the study considers in its framework and deliberation Schiefelbein and Farrell’s (1980) four dimensions of education equality namely, access (enrolment in school, also known as participation), survival (completing a given education cycle), output (levels of learning by gender) and outcomes (job status or income level access). By so doing the study shows that more is required in girls’ education besides creating access to schools and maintaining low wastage rates. Given that the fairly high access and retention rates that already exist in secondary education in Kenya and especially in girls’ schools, it is of vital importance that education output and outcomes are commensurate in single-sex schools in particular.

In this connection, it is useful and in tandem with the objectives of Education For All to evaluate where and how progress is being made towards gender equality in education by 2015.

Track studies research would take this study to a higher level. I would suggest that such study focus on transition from primary to secondary school and higher education paying special attention to age, gender, type of school attended, subjects taken in form three an four, achievement in KCSE, admission to university and other institutions of higher education and type of course taken. I would recommend that the study use each of the eight provinces in Kenya for a stratified sample.

Finally, in her article Fragmented framework? Researching women, gender, education and development, Elaine Unterhalter (2005:16) identifies frameworks and linked theories that have been used to frame research on gender equality in education. The first, women in
development (WID) is linked to modernisation and human capital theory; the second gender and development (GAD to structuralism and Marxism; the third post-structuralism to post colonial theory and finally human development to the capability approach. The WID approach has been used extensively to research women, gender, education and development in Kenya. This is because, as explained throughout this thesis, of the view and stand taken on gender equality within education.

As Kenya progresses in the attainment of EFA targets for primary and secondary education, it will become necessary to access or even monitor how policy is practiced in terms of implementation and interpretation. Research on women, gender, education and development will require more incisive approaches. Beyond issues of school access, structuralism, post colonial theory and the Armartya Sen’s capability approach offer researchers with the framework to question continued exploitation and social division in education and schooling; capabilities, power and identities of individuals, schools and communities; opportunity, choice and preference all of which remain largely unaccounted for under the WID approach.

9.6 CONCLUSION
This study adds to a growing number of studies that seek to understand and illuminate factors, features and issues that are important in girls education, without which, we would remain limited in our understanding of the nuances of gender equality in education. The study steers away from male and female comparison in order to avoid limiting the issues to gender construction and instead opens to scrutiny other players in girls’ education such as parents, teachers, education policies, historicity and even school culture.

Though small and case specific, this study opens up other ways of looking at girls’ education that are not being used in the study of gender, education and equality in Kenya.
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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A: STUDENT WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE

Kindly complete the following questionnaire and return it to the person who issued it to you. Answer all the questions honestly and accurately. Please tick against the answer, unless otherwise specified. If the question does not apply to you indicate so by using N/A. All personal information will remain confidential.

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Age _____  Form _______

FAMILY
1. My home is in a
   1. rural area    2. small town    3. big town    4. city

2. I attended the following primary school and did my KCPE there:
   1. a government day school
   2. a government boarding school
   3. a private boarding school
   4. a private day school

3. My primary school was in a
   1. rural area    2. small town    3. big town    4. city

4. My school fees is paid by (tick appropriate box or boxes)
   1. Father       4. Other relatives
   2. Mother       5. Guardian

5. We are ________ children in my family.

6. The highest level of formal education completed by my sister/s is:
   1. primary school
   2. secondary school
   3. *college
   4. university

7. The highest level of formal education completed by my brother/s is:
   1. primary school
   2. secondary school
   3. *college
   4. university

8. What level of education does your father have? (tick appropriate box)
   1. Never went to school
   2. Primary school education
   3. Secondary school education
   4. *College education
   5. University education

9. What level of education does your mother have? (tick appropriate box)
   1. Never went to school
   2. Primary school education
   3. Secondary school education
   4. *College education
   5. University education
10. What profession is your father in?

____________________________________________________________________

11. What profession is your mother in?

____________________________________________________________________

12. I have _____ sister/s working. She is/ they are in the following profession/s:

____________________________________________________________________

13. I have _____ brothers/s working. He is/they are in the following profession/s:

____________________________________________________________________

14. Do you wish to follow the example of your brothers/ sisters? Explain your answer?

____________________________________________________________________

15 a. What level of education do you aspire to achieve? (tick one)
1. Secondary school education
2. *College education
3. University education

15 b. What career (type of work or profession) do you aspire to do in the future?

____________________________________________________________________

15c. Why do you want to join this profession?

____________________________________________________________________

SCHOOL

16. a. Did you select to join your current school yourself?
   1. Yes
   2. No

16. b. If no, who advised you about the school and what convinced you to choose it?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
17. What is your experience of these school activities?
(tick appropriate box, one for each category)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Very enjoyable</th>
<th>Quite Enjoyable</th>
<th>Enjoyable</th>
<th>Quite Boring</th>
<th>Very Boring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Academic Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preps</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Career guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Games &amp; Sports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Clubs &amp; Societies</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Science Congress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Music &amp; Drama</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Others (specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. How would you rate the support given to you by the following people in your school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Very Supportive</th>
<th>Quite Supportive</th>
<th>Supportive</th>
<th>Hardly Supportive</th>
<th>Not Supportive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sch. Principal</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Class teacher</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Male teachers</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Female teachers</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Club patrons</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Classmates</td>
<td>7.</td>
<td>7.</td>
<td>7.</td>
<td>7.</td>
<td>7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Other students</td>
<td>9.</td>
<td>9.</td>
<td>9.</td>
<td>9.</td>
<td>9.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 a. Do you have a role model (someone you admire and want to imitate)?
Yes
No

19 b. Describe him/her and say what you would like to emulate (copy) from him/her.
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

19 c. Is your role model:
1. a member of staff in your school?
2. a student in your school
3. the school principal
4. other (please specify) ________________________________
SUBJECTS

20. Name your favourite subject. Give reasons why you like it.

I like it because: ____________________________________________

21. Name the subject that you dislike most. Give reasons why you dislike it

I dislike it because: ____________________________________________

22 a. Do you consider some subjects more important than others?

1. Yes

2. No

22 b. If your answer is yes, name one that is most important to you and give the reason why.

Subject: __________

Reason: _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

23. Are there subject/s that you would like to study that are not offered by your school? If yes, name them.

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

24. Please give your opinion on the following issues:

24 a. your role in society _____________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

24 b. university education _____________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

24 c. careers in science and technology ________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

Thank-you very much for your time, attention and willingness to be part of this study.

☺ Mweru ☺
APPENDIX B: TEACHERS’ WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE

Kindly complete the following questionnaire and return it to the person who issued it to you. Answer all the questions honestly and accurately. Please tick against the answer, unless otherwise specified. If the question does not apply to you indicate so by using N/A. All personal information will remain confidential.

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please put a tick against your answer to the question asked, unless otherwise specified.

If the question does not apply to you, indicate so by using N/A

1. Gender:
   1. Male
   2. Female

2. Educational qualifications:
   1. Diploma
   2. Bachelors degree
   3. Post Graduate Diploma in Education
   4. Masters degree
   5. Other (please specify) ____________________________________________

3. Present studies being undertaken:
   1. Diploma
   2. Bachelors degree
   3. Post Graduate Diploma in Education
   4. Masters degree
   5. Other (please specify) ____________________________________________
   6. None

4. Marital status:
   1. Married
   2. Not married.

5. Age category:
   1. 21-25
   2. 26-30
   3. 31-35
   4. 36-40
   5. 41-45
   6. 46-50
   7. 51-55
   8. 56-60

6. If you were not posted to your current school give reason(s) for applying to teach there

________________________________________________________________________
7. a. Total teaching experience: Years _____ Months _____

7. b. Teaching experience in years and months, prior to current posting:

Boys schools________________________________________________________
Girls schools________________________________________________________
Mixed schools________________________________________________________

8. Period taught at current school: From ____ to ___. Years ___ Months ____

9. Subjects trained to teach:

________________________________________________________________________

10 a. Subject/s taught at current school:

Form 1  ______________________________________________________
Form 2  ______________________________________________________
Form 3  ______________________________________________________
Form 4  ______________________________________________________

10 b. Lessons taught per week per subject _____________________________

11. Languages spoken and written other than English and Kiswahili:

________________________________________________________________________

12. Current positions of responsibility (tick appropriate box/es):

1. Head of Department
2. Subject head
3. Class teacher
4. House mistress/master
5. Games/Sports coach
6. School Club/ Society patron
7. Other (specify) __________________

13. Is teaching your choice career?

1. Yes
2. No
Give reasons for your answer

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

14. a. Given another career opportunity would you leave teaching?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. I am not sure

14. b  If yes, explain what you would rather be doing

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

15 a. Are you happy to be teaching in your current school?
   1. Yes
   2. No

15 b. Give detailed reasons for your answer

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

16 a. What are your experiences of teaching girls?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

16 b. Briefly describe the performance of the following students taking your subject?

Form 3: ...........................................................................................................

Form 4: ...........................................................................................................

16 c. What do you attribute to their performance?
17.a. How would you rate the career guidance programme in your school?
   1. Very effective
   2. Quite effective
   3. Effective
   4. Hardly effective
   5. Ineffective

17. b. How would you rate your involvement in career guidance at your school?
   1. Highly involved
   2. Quite involved
   3. Involved
   4. Hardly involved
   5. Not involved at all

18.a. Do you think your school offers students a good variety of subjects?

18 b. What new subjects would you like to be introduced in your school? Explain why.

19 a. If any, in what ways have role models shaped your life?
19.b.  Do you view yourself as a role model?
    1. Yes
    2. No

19. c. If your answer is yes, describe how you play this role in school.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

19.d. If your answer is no, why not?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

20. a  From your experience of teaching girls, what do you think could be done to improve the education of the girls at your school?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

20 b. What is your most significant contribution to girls’ education?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank-you very much for your time, attention and willingness to be part of this study.

⊙ Mweru Mwingi ⊙
APPENDIX D: SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’ WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE

Kindly complete the following questionnaire and return it to the person who issued it to you. Answer all the questions honestly and accurately. All personal information will remain confidential.

Please put a tick to your answer, unless otherwise specified.

If the question does not apply to you, indicate so by using N/A

1. Gender:
   3. Male
   4. Female

2. Educational qualifications:
   6. Diploma
   7. Bachelors degree
   8. Post Graduate Diploma in Education
   9. Masters degree
   10. Other (please specify) ____________________________________________

3. Present studies being undertaken:
   7. Diploma
   8. Bachelors degree
   9. Post Graduate Diploma in Education
   10. Masters degree
   11. Other (please specify) ____________________________________________
   12. None

4. Marital status:
   3. Married

5. Age category:
   8. 26-30
   9. 31-35
   10. 36-40
   11. 41-45
   12. 46-50
   13. 51-55
   7. 56-60

6. If you were not posted to your current school give reason(s) for applying to head there:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. Total teaching experience: Years_____ Months ______
8. a. Headship experience in years and months, prior to current posting:

Boys schools______________________________________________________
Girls schools______________________________________________________
Mixed schools______________________________________________________

8. b. Headship period at current school: _____ to ____. Years ____ Months ____

9. Subjects trained to teach:

____________________________________________________________________

10 a. Subject/s taught at current school:

None __________________________________________________________________
Form 1 __________________________________________________________________
Form 2 __________________________________________________________________
Form 3 __________________________________________________________________
Form 4 __________________________________________________________________

10 b. Lessons taught per week per subject _____________________________

11. Other positions of responsibility (please indicate):

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

12. Languages spoken and written other than English and Kiswahili:

____________________________________________________________________
13. Is teaching your choice career?
   1. Yes
   2. No

   Give reasons for your answer
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

14. a. Given another career opportunity would you leave teaching?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. I am not sure

14. b. If yes, explain what you would rather be doing
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

15. What are your experiences of heading a girls’ school?
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

16. a. Do you think your school offers a good range of subjects for students to select from?
   __________________________________________

16 b. What new subjects would you like to be introduced in your school? Explain why.
   __________________________________________
17. If any, in what ways have role models shaped your life?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

18. From your experience of heading a girls’ school, what would you like to do at your school to improve girls’ education?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

19. What is your most significant contribution to girls’ education?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank-you very much for your time, attention and willingness to be part of this study.

☺ MWERU ☺
APPENDIX E: STUDENTS’ FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. The majority of you come from rural areas (provide participants relevant statistics for each school), have schooled in rural primary schools and are now in a secondary school in a rural area. Do you feel hindered from achieving your educational dreams by the fact that you are:
   a) In yet another rural school?
   b) Do you feel disadvantaged being in a school in a rural area?
   c) What effect does being in a boarding school have on you as a person?

2. In the written questionnaire some of you indicated that you did not choose to be Yellowwood/ Fort Hall / Dominican (provide participants relevant statistics for each school).
   a) What were your first reactions on arrival at the school?
   b) In what ways has your attitude about the school changed/ remained the same?
   c) Does being in a school that is not of your choice affect your education in any way?
   d) Given an alternative, would you leave your school

3. How does it feel being in one of the top schools in Kenya (Yellowwood girls only)

4. How does it feel being in a former harambee school? (Fort Hall/ Dominican girls only)

5. What demands and expectations that are placed on you as a student in your school?
   a) Is this school meeting your educational aspirations? In what ways?

4. I want to refer you back to form one. Describe the people you came across and the kind of care that you received when you arrived in your new school for the first time. What impressions did you form of the following?
   - The school
   - The school principal
   - The teachers
   - Subjects
   - Student behaviour

5. Did these impressions have any impact on choices you have made with regard to your education since then?

6. Most of you reported that you find schooling experiences in your school enjoyable, what makes this so? (quote relevant statistics for each school)?

7. Why is university education so important to most of you (quote relevant statistics for each school)?
   a) If you do not make the admission grades for university, what will you do about your plans for a university education?

8. Soon you will leave school and begin to work towards a career. Tell us what you dream of doing with your life.

9. The questionnaire completed by you showed that fewer mothers than father have university education (quote relevant statistics for each school)?
   a) What do you have to say about this difference in educational levels between men and women?
   b) Does it affect you in any way?
   c) Many of you indicated that your mothers are your role models, why is this so?
   d) Say something about your other role models.
APPENDIX F: TEACHERS’ FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Is teaching a career choice for you?
   a. Do you derive satisfaction from teaching?
   b. Has teaching in your current school contributed to this satisfaction/dissatisfaction? Please explain how.
   c. Do you think being in another school would make a difference to how you feel about teaching?

2. Do you have future career plans?
   a. Are these plans in any way influenced or shaped by your experiences at this particular school?

TEACHING GIRLS

3. Have a look at the comments made by the teachers at your school of their experiences teaching girls (provide a sheet with comments for each respective school). It appears that the challenges of teaching girls are numerous. Comment briefly.

4. From your experience of teaching form ones, how would you describe the following aspects about them:
   a. Their ‘entry behaviour’, learning enthusiasm and attitude towards education.
   b. Knowledge of and exposure to key concepts in science and mathematics.

5. How much focus in terms of time, energy and resources is spent on form ones and twos as compared to threes and fours?

6. (This question is for those that hold these offices) The following teaching and administrative positions are found in your school, Guidance and Counselling, Dean of Studies and Curriculum, and HOD Science.
   a. What are the your roles and duties of your offices?
   b. What are your greatest challenges?
   c. What milestones have you reached so far?

7. (This question is for those that hold these offices) The office of a head of department is one of consultation.
   a. Do you work collaboratively with each other as heads of department?
   b. How often do you have mothers/fathers seeking consultation?
   c. What information is commonly sought?
   d. Do parents show an awareness of and an interest in the trends in higher education?
   e. Would you describe them as conversant with the trends in the job market?
   f. Are they according to you, able to adequately advice their daughters on subject electives and career choices?
   g. Do they give suggestions as to how the school might improve its curriculum?

8. You must be aware of government efforts to endorse, more seriously, the learning of science and technical subjects in schools. This is done to prepare a skilled workforce for a science and technology based future. In this school, subject electives taken by the form three and fours show the following trends (quote trends relevant to each school):
   a. What do you attribute these trends to?
   b. What is your vision for science learning in this school and what have you embarked upon in order to realize it?
c) Do you think offering the following subjects; accounts, economics and foreign languages might improve academic performance, give the girls better career options and better their chances for admission into more prestigious courses at the university?

9. Public university admissions since the first 8-4-4 intake in 1990 show the following trend in your school *(quote statistics relevant for each school)*:
   a. Say something about these statistics in relation to the kind resources you have and the ability of the girls enrolled in your school?
   b. What is the potential of this school to produce girls destined for careers in science and technology?

10. Both teachers and the girls have stated that the girls have a “lax attitude” to their education. Poor time management, noise during times assigned for study and even incomplete or poorly done work feature are some of the attributes.
   a. What would you as teachers say is the reason for this?
   b. How is this the case for a boarding school?
APPENDIX G: DEPUTY PRINCIPALS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL BASE FORMAT FOR ALL SCHOOLS

PERSONAL DETAILS
1. Is teaching your choice of career?
   a. What do you derive from teaching?
   b. Has teaching in your current school contributed to this satisfaction/dissatisfaction? Please explain how.
   c. What attracted you to the position of deputy principal?
   d. What is your career plan for the future?

THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL
2. Your position is senior and second in hierarchy to the school principal:
   a. What are your roles, duties and responsibilities in this school?
   b. What are your greatest challenges/struggles?
   c. What do you strive for as the deputy principal of this school?
   d. What milestones have you reached so far?
   e. What is your vision for this school?

3. The nature of your office is one where consultation is made:
   a. How often do students consult you and what kind of information do they seek?
   b. How often do parents consult you and what kind of information do they seek? Who visits your office more, mothers or fathers?
   c. What contributions and/or suggestions do parents make to you concerning the education of their daughters?

5. In your dealings with students have you observed the impact and influence of socio-cultural and socio-economic factors? Kindly explain in what kinds of ways, if any.

6. How would you describe girls’ discipline in this school?

TEACHING GIRLS
5. Read through the comments made by the teachers at your school of their experiences with girls (quote comments relevant to each school).
   a. What are your comments?

6. Higher education has diversified and there are numerous options through which one can gain university admission.
   a. What is the potential of this school to produce girls that are ‘university material’
   b. Where do the girls that leave this school end up doing/what do they become?
   c. What kind of stories do the girls that come to ‘clear’ (collect their examination certificates) tell you about their future plans
APPENDIX H: SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

YELLOWWOOD GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL

1. Let us begin with some information on your personal background.
   a) Where are you from?
   b) Where did you receive your e. primary, secondary, college/university education?
   c) Do you have future career plans?

2. I would like us to discuss how you came into school leadership/administration.
   a) What attracted you to school administration?
   b) In the many years that you have been a school principal, what have the most striking impressions been with regard girls and their education?
   c) What are some of the greatest challenges/struggles you have had with regard to the education of girls?
   d) Is there anything that comes easy for girls in their education?

3. Unlike two of your predecessors, you are not an ‘old girl’ of Yellowwood, neither did you teach or become a deputy principal in the school. The absence of ‘insider experiences’ therefore makes your views of Yellowwood worthwhile to investigate.
   a) What are your impressions of Yellowwood?
   b) What kind of girls would you like to mould and make out of this school?
   c) What is your vision for this school?

4. Yellowwood has highly experienced teachers in science and mathematics. The school also has good science facilities and it takes the top female brains in the district. Some of the teachers interviewed have described these girls as “academically challenging”. Some of the girls interviewed expressed that they have the assurance of passing KCSE because of attending this school. All the same, university intake since 1990, when the first 8-4-4 candidates were admitted, shows that Yellowwood primarily produces girls destined for careers in education, arts and humanities.
   a) Please explain why the top school in the district takes barely a fifth of its girls to university each year.
   b) Do you think low intake in university is an attribute of the standard of education in Murang’a district?
   c) Does Yellowwood compare favourably with other schools in its league?

5. You must be aware of the efforts by government to endorse the learning science and technical subjects in schools. This is done to prepare a skilled workforce for a science and technology based future. Here in Yellowwood, subject electives taken by the form three and fours show the following trends:
   - Physics is the most unpopular subject
   - Typing and Office Practice is a ‘dying’ subject
   - Subjects with a demanding practical component such as Art, Music, Home Science and Agriculture are decreasing in popularity
   - Computer studies, although popular, is still a non-examinable subject.
   - Humanities are popular
   - All the girls want to pursue university education
     a. What do you attribute these trends to?
     b. What plans does the school have to make Computer Studies examinable?
     c. How are you going to deal with ‘dying’ subjects?

6. Data collected from the Student and Teacher Questionnaires indicates that there is a perceived, a need for the school to broaden the curriculum i.e. increase the number of subjects that
students can choose from. The subjects recommended included Foreign Languages, Accounts, Economics and Computer Studies.

a) Does your school have the capacity to accommodate an expanded curriculum?
b) Do you think the girls would be more advantaged or less advantaged with such a broad choice?

7. Your school is large and you probably deal with a range of parents.
   a) In your experience with parents, who comes to see you more, the mothers or the fathers? What are the most common reasons for these visits?
   b) What are the greatest challenges you face with parents?
   c) Do the parents show keen interest in the education of their girls?
   d) Do they show awareness of and interest in the trends in higher education and the job market?
   e) Describe the ways in which parents make contributions their daughters’ education in Yellowwood?

8. The majority of the teachers interviewed felt that the school is understaffed. They said that their workloads are big particularly because of the size of the classes. “Exhaustion” and ‘tiredness’ were cited as reasons hindering more effective teaching and follow-up.
   a) What is your comment on this?

9. Murang’a district has been a political hotbed for a number of years. Do you think local politics has had any impact on education in the district?
FORT HALL GIRLS SCHOOL

1. Let us begin with some information on your personal background.
   a) Where are you from?
   b) Where did you receive your e. primary, secondary, college/ university education?
   c) Do you have future career plans?

2. I would like us to discuss school leadership and administration.
   a) What are your greatest challenges/ struggles with regard to the education of girls?
   b) From your teaching and leadership experiences, do you think girls maximize fully the benefits of boarding school education?

3. You have been at Fort Hall for over a year, what is your impression of Fort Hall Girls School?
   a) What is your vision for this school?
   b) What kind of girls would you like create and mould out of this school?

TEACHING GIRLS

4. Fort Hall Girls’ has highly experienced teachers of science and mathematics, the school also has good science facilities, a fact that the girls know and appreciate. The KCSE mean grade has stabilized at C plain. However, the performance in science and maths subjects has not been very encouraging. Comment on the performance below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>D 2.66</td>
<td>(109)</td>
<td>D- 1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>C- 4.9509</td>
<td>(52 )</td>
<td>C+ 6.6050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>D- 1.73</td>
<td>(82)</td>
<td>C- 4.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>D 3.030</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>D+ 3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological sciences</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>C- 4.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical sciences</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>D 3.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From: The 2000 KCSE Subject Analysis Report by the DEO Murang’a

6. Fort Hall, an increasingly popular school, but it produces such few girls for the university?
   a) What do the girls who leave this school end up becoming and why?
   b) What is the potential of this school to produce university material?

5. Read through the comments made by the teachers at your school of their observations of and experiences with girls (supply sheet of comments).
   a) What are your comments?

6. You must be aware of government efforts to endorse the learning of science and technology subjects in schools. This is done to prepare a skilled workforce for a science and technology based future. In Fort Hall, subject electives taken by the form threes and fours show the following trend:
   - Maths, physics and chemistry are the worst subjects.
   - English, commerce, history, biology are the favourite subjects.
   - English and Maths are considered as important subjects.
   - Computer science is popular.
   - 75% of the girls would like to be taught foreign languages, 20% Art and Design, 18% Accounts and 13% Music. Other subjects recommended include Economics, Aviation, Electricity.
   - Of the 63 FIII that completed the questionnaire, 56 aspire for university education, 7 college education and none for secondary.
   - Of the 51 FIV that completed the questionnaire, 34 aspire for university education, 17 college and none secondary.
a) What is your comment on these trends?

7. Data collected from the Student and Teacher Questionnaires indicated the need for the school to broaden the curriculum i.e. increase the number of subjects that students can choose from. The subjects recommended included Foreign Languages, Accounts, and Fine Art and Music.
   a) Does that school have the capacity to accommodate an expanded curriculum?
   b) Do you think the girls would be more advantaged or less advantaged with such a broad choice?

8. In terms of gender, age, teaching qualifications and teaching experience, Fort Hall has a wide and balanced range. Added to that, the majority 24/26 have stated that they are satisfied teaching at Fort Hall, 23/26 also say that teaching is their career choice. However, 14/26 stated that they would opt to leave teaching given another opportunity. 7/26 state that would not and 5/26 stated that they would not leave.
   a) Is there any indication/evidence of unsettledness among your teachers?
   b) Do you think the desire to opt out of teaching has any impact on teaching and/or performance of the school?

9. Your school is large and you probably deal with a range of parents.
   a) In your experience with parents, who comes to see you more, the mothers or the fathers? What are the most common reasons for these visits?
   b) What are the greatest challenges you face with parents?
   c) Do the parents show keen interest in the education of their girls?
   d) Do they show awareness of and interest in the trends in higher education and the job market?
   e) Describe the ways in which parents make contributions their daughters’ education in this school.

10. Murang’a district has been a political hotbed for a number of years. Do you think local politics has had any impact on education in the district?
DOMINICAN GIRLS SCHOOL

1. Let us begin with some information on your personal background.
   a) Where are you from?
   b) Where did you receive your e. primary, secondary, college/ university education?
   c) Do you have future career plans?

2. I would like us to discuss school leadership and administration.
   a) What are your greatest challenges/ struggles with regard to the education of girls?
   b) From your teaching and leadership experiences, do you think girls maximize fully the benefits of boarding school education?

3. You will agree with me that Dominican is a relatively young school, however, it is developing fast.
   a) What is your impression of the girls in your school?
   b) What kind of girls would you like to create and mould out of this school?
   c) What is your vision for this school?

TEACHING GIRLS

4. Dominican has improved and increased the teaching and learning facilities. It has qualified teachers some of whom have 10 years teaching experience. All the same, KCSE performance is below average as seen below. What are our comments:

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From: The 2000 KCSE Subject Analysis Report by the DEO Murang’a

   a) Dominican is boarding school and the girls have the advantage of being in a quiet learning environment. Why then is academic performance below average?

5. Read through the comments made by the teachers at your school of their observations of and experiences with girls.
   a) What are your comments?

6. What is the potential of this school to produce ‘university material’?
   a) Where do the girls that leave this school end up?

7. You must be aware of government efforts to endorse the learning of science and technology subjects in schools. This is done to prepare a skilled workforce for a science and technology based future. Here in Dominican, subject electives taken by the form threes and fours show the following trend:
   - Physics is the most unpopular subject
   - Biology, English, Home Science are the favourite subjects
   - Maths and Biology are considered important subjects
   - 48.7% of the girls would like Foreign Languages to be offered in the school, 5% Typing and Office Practice and 6% Accounting.
   - 32% do not feel the need for additional subjects to the curriculum.
   - Of the 38 form fours, 26 aspire to attain university education, 10 college education and none secondary education.
   - Of the 40 form threes 22 desire university education, 17 college education and 1 secondary education.
   a) What is your comment on these trends?
   b) What would you attribute these trends to?
8. Data collected from the Student and Teacher Questionnaires indicated the need for the school to broaden the curriculum i.e. increase the number of subjects that students can choose from. The subjects recommended included Foreign Languages, Accounts, and Typing and Office Practice.
   a) Does that school have the capacity to accommodate an expanded curriculum?
   b) Do you think the girls would be more advantaged or less advantaged with such a broad choice?

9. In terms of gender, age, teaching qualifications and experience, Dominican has a good balance of young teachers in the age range 26-40. A significant number have 10 years teaching experience. Of the 14 teachers that completed the questionnaire, 5 said that teaching is not a career choice. 5 would opt to leave teaching given another career opportunity and another 5 are not sure. Only 2 of the 14 stated that they would not leave teaching. All the same, the majority 11 out of 14 is satisfied to be working in Dominican.
   a) Is there any indication/evidence of unsettledness among your teachers?
   b) Do you think the desire to opt out of teaching has any impact on the teaching and performance of the school?

10. Though your school is small in terms of enrolment you deal with a range of parents:
   a) In your experience with parents, who comes to see you more, the mothers or the fathers? What are the most common reasons for these visits?
   b) What are the greatest challenges you face with parents?
   c) Do the parents show keen interest in the education of their girls?
   d) Do they show awareness of and interest in the trends in higher education and the job market?
   e) Describe the ways in which parents make contributions their daughters’ education in Yellowwood?

11. Murang’a district has been a political hotbed for a number of years. Do you think multi-party politics has had any impact on education in the district?
## Appendix I: Yellowwood Form III Focus Group Participant Profiles

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462
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## APPENDIX L: NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM: SUBJECT DISTRIBUTION IN FIII AND FIV

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<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Technical / applied science subjects</th>
<th>Cultural subjects/ foreign languages</th>
<th>Maximum number of subjects</th>
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Source: Ministry of Education Science and Technology Management of the Primary and Secondary Education Curriculum 2001: Circular INS/ME/A/2/1A/124
### APPENDIX M: KCSE SUBJECT REGISTRATION BY YEAR AND GENDER:
NATIONAL TRENDS FOR 1999-2001

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Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Statistical Data. * denotes core subjects which are also compulsory
## APPENDIX N - KCSE subject enrolment in Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican

| Sch | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 |
|-----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| FH  | 152    | 141    | 127    | 127    | 152    | 141    | 127    | 127    | 152    | 141    | 127*   | 127*   | 152    | 141    | 18     | 23     | 152    | 141    | 127    | 127    | 152    | 141    | 127    | 127    | 152    | 141    | 127    |
| D   | 70     | 73     | 78     | 74     | 70     | 73     | 78     | 74     | 70     | 73     | 78     | 74     | 70     | 73     | 19     | 15     | 70     | 73     | 19     | 15     | 19     | 15     | 70     | 73     | 19     | 15     | 70     | 73     |

| Sch | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 |
|-----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Y   | 194    | 187    | 68     | 33     | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | 194    | 187    | 0      | 0      | 78     | 78     | 5      | 15     | 6      | 13     | 5      | 110    | 96     | 28     | 12     | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    |
| FH  | 152    | 141    | 25     | 19     | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | 152    | 141    | 62     | 31     | 51     | 40     | 40     | 25     | 40     | 101    | 94     | 31     | 36     | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    |
| D   | 70     | 73     | 38     | 31     | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | 70     | 73     | 0      | 0      | 25     | 40     | 40     | 25     | 40     | 35     | 42     | 24     | 36     | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    |

<p>| Sch | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 | Form 1 | Form 2 | Form 3 | Form 4 |
|-----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Y   | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | 0      | 0      | 0      | 0      | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    |
| FH  | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | 152    | 141    | 18     | 16     | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    |
| D   | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | 70     | 73     | 0      | 0      | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    | n/a    |</p>
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<th>Accounting</th>
<th>B/Education</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Economics</th>
<th>Typing &amp; Office Practice</th>
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<td>Form 4</td>
<td>Form 1</td>
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<td>Source: Office of the Dean of Studies in each school, 2002</td>
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* denotes core subjects that are compulsory in F3 and F4
APPENDIX O: 2000 KCSE RESULTS IN MURANG’A DISTRICT - AVAILABILITY, CHOICE AND ACHIEVEMENT IN SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

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**TOTAL %** | 1076 | 100% | 841 | 78% | 225 | 30% | 931 | 87% | 233 | 22% | 233 | 22% | 246 | 23% | 456 | 42% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 7 | 0.6% | 23 | 2% |

**SOURCE:** 2000 KCSE RESULTS MURANG'A DISTRICT
**NO** = Number of girls taking subject. **MG** = average mean grade for subject. **Hash** = no girl taking subject. *** = Compulsory subject**
APPENDIX P: 2000 KCSE SUBJECT ENROLMENT IN BOYS AND GIRLS SCHOOLS IN MURANG’A DISTRICT

<p>| Subject Enrollment in Boys’ and Girls’ Schools in Murang’a District: KCSE 2000 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|</p>
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Source: District Education Office Murang’a
## APPENDIX Q: YELLOWWOOD: A TRACK RECORD OF KCSE ACHIEVEMENT FROM 2001-1999

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Source: Yellowwood Girls High School: KCSE academic records
## APPENDIX R: FORT HALL: A TRACK RECORD OF KCSE ACHIEVEMENT FROM 2001-1999

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Source: Fort Hall Girls Secondary School KCSE academic records

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Source: Dominican Girls School KCSE academic records
APPENDIX T: Admissions into public universities by degree course 1991-2001: Yellowwood, Fort Hall and Dominican

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APPENDIX U: APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

Mweru Mwingi
Education Department
Rhodes University
PO BOX 94
Grahamstown
6140
South Africa

1st November 2001

The Principal
__________ Girls’ High School
PO BOX
_______
Kenya

Dear Madam

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

As a follow-up to my telephone conversation this morning, this is to let you know that I arrive in Kenya on 28 December 2001 and will be in and out of your school for six months as from January 2002. Your school is among the three that I have drawn from a stratified sample.

I have applied for permission to conduct research from the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education, so what I plan to do is not underhand. I will pursue the release of the permit immediately I arrive in Kenya and this permit is open to your scrutiny. Enclosed here is a letter from my university explaining the nature of my research.

In the meanwhile, I will give you a call immediately schools open in January. Hopefully, I can make an appointment with you so that we discuss my research schedule. I am looking forward to conducting research in your school.

Yours sincerely

Mweru Mwingi

Encl.
APPENDIX V: LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN
SCHOOLS AND RESEARCH CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

[Image of a letter]

To the Principals
Secondary Schools:

RE: REQUEST FOR SUPPORT OF DOCTORAL STUDENT
MS. IDA M. KALUA, ET. AL.

This is to inform you that Ms. Idah Kalua, a doctoral student at MUKAT University, has been granted permission to seek the support for an empirical study focusing on gender issues in education. Her research will include the use of questionnaires and interviews to obtain information from students, teachers, school principals, parents, and officials at the District Office, the EDC, and the Ministry of Education.

Please extend her an equal opportunity.

[Signature]

Per Division Education Officer
MUKATIA
APPENDIX W

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

You are invited to participate in a research conducted by Mweru Mwingi, from the Department of Education at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. Your school has been drawn from a stratified sample and through your participation, I hope to learn about your educational perceptions and how related values affect your academic performance, subject choices and career aspirations. The research is multi-layered and will involve four categories of people: students, teachers, parents and school principals. The research is a study that will contribute to my Ph.D dissertation.

Participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, I will ask you to answer a questionnaire that will take about 20 minutes to complete. I will use the questionnaire to obtain baseline data and ask you to participate in a 90 minute focus group interview with 5-7 other students. I appreciate the demands this will place on your time, and will arrange interview times and venues to fit in with your schedule. The timing and location for group interviews may require some give and take so I will settle for what is agreeable to the group. The purpose of this group interview is to give you an opportunity to talk about your experiences as a student, particularly your perceptions of education and your value for it. I propose to audiotape all the interviews.

I expect that this study will contribute to our understanding of the features that shape girls education subsequently the values they hold and the choices that they make. Finally, the study should help policy-makers, teacher-trainers, school principals, teachers, parents to engage in new ways of thinking about your education and to draw up corrective interventions that will improve girls education all round.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your identity and that of your school will be kept confidential by use of pseudonyms. I cannot, of course, guarantee confidentiality for the group interviews. I appeal to you to respect one another’s confidentiality in these groups. All the tapes will be transcribed by myself. All tapes and notes will remain in my possession. One the study is completed I will submit a copy of the research findings to your school principal.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Mweru Mwingi
PO BOX 8 Sagana. Tel (0163) 46008.

Or my supervisors:
Dr Denise Zinn and Professor Hennie vander Mescht
Department of Education
Rhodes University
PO BOX 94
Grahamstown 6140
South Africa.
Tel: +27-9-46-6038383

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you are willing to participate, that you are not waiving any claims, rights or remedies.

Signature____________________________________ Date _____________________