Gender and Education in Uganda

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Summary

Gendered oppression is complex and situated in social constructs which are manifested and learned in education institutions and learning programs the world over. The UN Sustainable Development Goals are an international attempt to create a more equitable world, and they include both education and gender as independent and interdependent goals. Uganda is a country that is attempting to address the significant gender oppression that plagues it. To cure gender oppression realistically and fully, a deep and transformative approach that addresses systemic power imbalances is essential. A disruption of this magnitude requires critical and empowering education that simultaneously ruptures the violence of patriarchy and creates conditions of capability for everyone to heal and move forward together.

Keywords: gender, Uganda education, gender transformative pedagogy, gender and development, critical capabilities, patriarchy

Subjects: Education, Change, and Development, Education, Gender, and Sexualities

Introduction

In the *Second Sex*, French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (2010) famously states, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." What does it mean to "become a woman"? In a Western feminist understanding, "becoming woman" occurs when physical and social understandings of the body are linked. When a body emerges from another body, it may or may not have certain physical characteristics. For example, it may have a uterus or it may not; it may have testes and/or ovaries, or it may not; a body may have atypical sexual organs (large clitoris but no vaginal opening) or it may have undeveloped gonads. The point is that bodies come into being in multiple configurations; thus, for most feminists, biology is not binary but multiplicitous. Therefore, one way to understand de Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" is to see how social scripts (learned behavior) about ways of being woman/man, masculine/feminine come to overlay and define bodies. These social scripts include arguments that since x body was born with, for example, a penis, said body should also behave in ways that are what one might call masculine (e.g., not be sensitive or caring). In this way, social scripts like being sensitive and caring become connected to biological traits, and when this occurs bodies are set on gendered trajectories that, in many cases, impact them from cradle to grave.

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Taking up this issue in *The Body and Social Theory*, British sociologist Chris Shilling (2012) provides a compelling analysis of how "gendered social practices" (e.g., social scripts that offer *boys* access to different forms of physical activity while denying *girls*) literally impact the development and/or underdevelopment of their bodies (p. 108). For instance, if boys are given access to weights to build their strength, they will be stronger. Rather than attributing strength to a matter of *access* to tools designed to increase strength (weights and strenuous activity), the *difference* in strength between *boys* and *girls* gets interpreted as biological and becomes one of many signifiers of male superiority. For Shilling, "cognitive conceptualizations of bodies are closely related to our embodied experiences. If these experiences are gendered, they may support dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity" (p. 108). Shilling continues:

> Simone de Beauvoir captured these differences in her argument that becoming woman involves an apprenticeship into roles, customs and body techniques that are passive compared to those characteristics of "training for manhood." While girls are gradually created as vehicles for men to use in pursuit of their own ends, boys are introduced to combative sports that teach them how to use their body against "any attempt to reduce [them] to the status of an object." (p. 108)

In beginning this article with examples of how prominent Western thinkers like de Beauvoir and Shilling have sought to understand gender—especially when gender is thought of as not only binary but also a priori, meaning that one is *always already* man or woman—this is not to suggest that Western feminism and other theories committed to liberation are postgender or that Western society *writ large* has fully embraced gender as dynamic and fluid while at the same time letting bodies exist without the imposition of labels. In fact, notions of gender—particularly when it comes to safety and access to safe places—remain a contested and a critical site of struggle, advocacy, and resistance for feminists and gender scholars. Rather, by beginning with Western feminism, this entry signals an awareness of the problematics of gender especially when Western feminist researchers turn their gaze to the Global South, in this specific case, Uganda. Thus, in writing about education in Uganda, it is important to be transparent about how scholars carry their academic training with them. Given a scholar's particular academic training and because of who some scholars are as scholar/activists, objectivity is impossible and neutrality—especially when a group of people face violence, discrimination, and limitation because they are women—is not the goal.

When addressing issues related to gender in a Ugandan educational context that is non-Western, postcolonial, and rooted in values that are open and, at the same time, slow to change, we—David, a white male radical adult educator; Lupe, an Afro-Latina feminist scholar who is committed to coalitional politics, freedom, and liberation; and John, a white male critical urban planner—support and acknowledge the work undertaken by our educational colleagues in Uganda to lessen the negative impact of gender on education, on all areas of society, and especially on women's bodies and choices. It is from a position of great respect for our colleagues that we approach the subject of gender in Uganda and how gender manifests in the Ugandan educational context. Nevertheless, we believe that within this praxis of respect there is room for discussion, analysis, and critique especially when lives of a specific group of people—in this case women and

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girls—are limited based on things that are external to them. Socially constructed conceptions and patriarchal assumptions about biology and nature restrict and constrict the lives and choices of girls and women in all facets of Ugandan society, education included.

In an attempt to further make visible the interconnectedness between socially constructed gender roles and education in Uganda, this article does the following: First, it discusses conversations about gender and gender sensitivity in Uganda. Though often touted as increasing awareness about the constructed nature of gender, on a practical level gendered practices, gendered beliefs, and the gender binary remain stubbornly fixed and by and large accepted as normal and natural. Second, it provides a critical analysis of gender and education in Uganda, suggesting the concept of structural institutional gaslighting be used to understand how patriarchy shapes the educational experiences of women and girls. Finally, it proposes that gender transformative educational practices could lead to an educational system that actualizes Uganda's stated commitment to gender equity as well as helping fulfill Uganda's obligations as a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Development Agenda (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

This article follows the critical capability/gender transformative approach to learning tradition. It differentiates between gender-sensitive and gender-transformative praxis using the definition from the IDH sustainable trade initiative Gender Toolkit (IDH, n.d.).

Gender Sensitive = "Acknowledging the different needs and constraints of women and men without changing the status quo."

Gender Transformative = "Addressing gender imbalances, changing gendered power relations, and actively building equitable social norms and structures."

Gender Sensitivity in Uganda

Following the social constructs of gender according to de Beauvoir (2010), a theme pursued throughout this article, this section is a general overview of gender in Uganda. Uganda is signatory to the SDGs and so this overview uses and critiques SDG measurements.

The government of Uganda, under pressure from women's activist groups such as Action for Women in Development (AFCODE) and the Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), has taken several measures to address gender inequality in Uganda. A chronological list of such measures includes

1997 the creation of Uganda's first National Gender Policy (NGP)

1998 the establishment of Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

2001 the mandate for local governments to include gender issues in decision-making processes

2010 Africa's first master's program in Gender Aware Economics offered at Makerere University

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Due to these active and targeted government interventions, some gender disparity has been addressed. Research conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015) bears this out. The report highlights that 35% of seats in parliament are now occupied by women. The report also claims that education parity in primary school has been achieved and 90% achieved in secondary schools. Importantly, the government of Uganda has embraced the UNDP's Gender Equality Seal (GES). Focused on improving workplace conditions, the GES stated priorities include (a) eliminating gender-based pay gaps; (b) increasing women's roles in decision-making; (c) enhancing work-life balance; (d) enhancing women's access to nontraditional jobs; (d) eradicating sexual harassment at work; (e) using inclusive, nonsexist communication; and (f) promoting women in business and cross-cutting the gender perspective in value chains. In 2016, 13 private companies in Uganda became the first in Africa to sign up to implement the Gender Equality Seal. The UNDP (2015) gender assessment report on Uganda highlights the important role played by the 1997 National Gender Policy in opening the way to laws aimed at protecting the population from certain forms of violence. These laws include the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (2009), the Domestic Violence Act (2010), the Domestic Violence Regulations (2011), and the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2010). Nevertheless, despite the attention given to decreasing the negative impact of gender on the everyday lives of Ugandans, there remain significant challenges to overcome.

In addition to highlighting Uganda's success in combating gender disparity, the UNDP (2015) report also suggests that there is a significant discrepancy between policy and practice, as well as a lack of government funding for the implementation and monitoring of what on paper reads as progressive gender policy. The report also suggests that gender precarity is linked to rapid population growth; deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes, beliefs, and practices that serve to exclude women; the persistence of sexual and gender-based violence; and the disproportionate labor women bear in unpaid "care" work in the household. There are two remarkable aspects of the 2015 report that stand out. First, the report frames these factors in terms of human capital; the points in the report are explained in terms of the "economic" rather than "human impact." In the case of gender- and sexual-based violence, for example, the report seems to suggest that when women miss work due to sexual and/or physical violence, their absence impacts a country's economic productivity. This is not disputed. What remains deeply problematic is the underlying message that a strong economy is reason enough to focus on harm reduction in women's homes and communities rather than women's inherent right to bodily integrity. The government has a moral obligation to protect its citizens in both the public and the private spheres. As stated by Shahra Razavi (2018):

> The notion of separate spheres has created long-lasting silences that persist to this day, in terms of what is considered to have value, what qualifies as a crime, and what is defined as political, while muffling women's voices and obscuring the most pervasive harms done to them. (p. 27)

Second, the UNDP (2015) report does not include education as a factor impacting gender inequality. The absence is striking given the conditions of violence described in the report, and it reinforces the isolation of education as a formal practice measured by numbers and considered

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accomplished. This is especially problematic because the UNDP has a large influence on Uganda policy and practice in relation to gender and the SDGs. From a gender transformation perspective, a deeper and more critical analysis of power and agency should be included in an analysis of (in)equality, which both moves beyond the economic rationale for equality and locates education as a key driver of transformation.

Thus far, this article has focused on how the Ugandan government has responded to "gender." What it has not done is offer a clear explanation of what gender—in a Ugandan context—is or how gender is operationalized. The 2019 guidelines for Gender Responsive Pedagogy in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education in Uganda provides a glossary of gender-related terms; defining gender as:

> socially constructed differences and distinctions between men and women. Gender differs from sex in that it is not biologically determined. Gender distinctions include the different attributes, statuses, roles, responsibilities, and potentialities as well as their access to and control over resources and benefits.
>
> (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019, n.p.)

After reading the definitions provided in the guidelines, some might come away feeling that by defining gender as "socially constructed" and "not biologically determined" the guidelines offer a progressive take on gender, one that is in line with critical discourses attempting to disrupt heteronormative understandings of gender. However, these notions are undermined in practice. Upon reading the guidelines it can be argued that in and of themselves, words like "socially constructed" are linguistically important when used to describe gender especially in sociocultural conservative contexts, because these words—one might also say utterances or even claims—carry with them a certain kind of rhetorical force. The power of these words can be amplified when the word is produced (verbally or in writing) by a person or institution with significant political, cultural, and/or social power. They can signal the person or institution's own contribution to this social construct. However, the concern here involves the co-option of terms like "socially constructed"—which are intentionally deployed to disrupt and challenge binary understandings of gender—by people or institutions that lack any commitment to radical change. When co-option occurs, radical words lose their power to disrupt; they become symbolically empty words without any tangible impact on everyday life.

To put this another way, return to the words "socially constructed." If one compares the usage of words in the 2019 guidelines with how those words are reinforced in all areas of Ugandan society, one would see that the 2019 guidelines are untethered from the gendered lived experiences of women and girls in Uganda. Words like "socially constructed" live in documents like the 2019 guidelines (e.g., in the guideline's definition of gender) but lack any social performance that confirms their validity. When words/claims/utterances are devoid of continual social performance rooted in action, such words like "socially constructed" are stripped of their ability to constitute reality; they signify nothing.

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Second, this article is concerned with how the 2019 guidelines—and indeed other widely available national and international documents—use language that obfuscates power. Take, for instance, the following example used by the 2019 guidelines to describe an instance of "gender discrimination": "Gender discrimination entails unfair and differential treatment meted out to people based on their gender. Females are often the victims of gender discrimination. For example, they suffer gender discrimination with regard to employment, education, and decision-making" (p. viii).

On the surface, this definition looks like other normative, "progressive" takes on gender discrimination. In the case of the specific definition used in the 2019 guidelines, note that it actually minimizes the pervasiveness of discrimination against a specific class of people—women; this definition also does not address the status of transgender women. Second, this definition does not call out or make visible the main perpetrators of gender discrimination against women—men—nor does this definition name-check the system of oppression that keeps gender discrimination in place—patriarchy. What if the 2019 guidelines defined gender discrimination in the following way?

> Gender discrimination entails unfair and differential treatment meted out mainly against those identified as female based on socially constructed notions of biology and gender. Gendered people, with the support of patriarchal social, religious, and cultural institutions participate in gender discrimination against those gendered as female in different ways. When those gendered as male actively engage in gender discrimination against those gendered female with regard to employment, education, and decision making, they do so from a position of privilege and superiority granted by patriarchy. Conversely, while those gendered as female can and do participate in gender discrimination against others gendered female, they do so from a place of internalized gender discrimination. An example of this might be when a person gendered female teaches her children that boys and men are superior to girls and women because that is the way God made things speaks from a position of inferiority transmitted through the patriarchal teachings of the church.

Granted, this might be a rather cumbersome definition of gender discrimination. But it attempts to accomplish the following objectives: (a) to challenge institutions that express a commitment to gender equity to use language that reflects the actual reality of gender discrimination, (b) to use language in a way that teases out the nuances of gender and gender discrimination without reifying gender roles and stereotypes, (c) to challenge definitions of gender discrimination that do not name the system of oppression that undergirds gender discrimination, and (d) to specify how those gendered female can participate in gender discrimination as conscripts in the war for male dominance and power.

This same obfuscation of power dynamics is evident in other aspects of the education system as well. The literature and documents on gender issues and education in Uganda tend to focus on the negative *effects* of gender in education settings; they rarely focus on the *cause* which is the oppression of women and girls. Therefore, this section concludes with the deliberate use of the

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phrase "women and girl's issues" and "patriarchy" in order not to confuse and conflate the problems of gender absences. Ideally, this discussion has made clear the concern of some scholars and advocates regarding the silenced oppression of women's basic human rights. The gender issues here are very much a reflection of what people have learned and demonstrate, as North (2010) highlighted, the "interconnections between schooling and the gendered social, political and economic context" (p. 428). Schools can be locations where social norms are reinforced and reproduced, or they can, to varying degrees, be sites of liberation. Where on the spectrum they fall is very much related to the type of education that is being offered. Unfortunately, schools in Uganda are patriarchal and authoritative. They manifest gender inequality and prepare boys and girls for heteronormative social roles.

In our consideration of gender and education, this article builds on the critical, feminist, capability, and human rights-based development theory to suggest that if gender sensitivity and education are to have a true impact in Uganda, the educational system must be willing to move beyond a focus on numbers or counting bodies in seats. This approach is largely embraced by the gender and development (GAD) writers (DeJagheare, 2018; Powell, 2012; Stromquist, 2002; Unterhalter, 2014), and it resembles the transformative gender definition while problematizing the women in development (WID) gender-sensitive perspective (Boserup, 1970; see McGrath, 2018, for criticism of how the World Bank integrated a human capital ideology) embraced by the World Bank. The WID approach rests on a neoliberal, human capital ideology that interprets and evaluates the world according to market commodities (Rowlands, 1997). This article draws on critical feminists such as Stromquist (2003) who explain how neoliberal policy negatively impacts women the most. In terms of education, we draw on the critical transformative tradition rooted in the ideas of Paulo Freire, Julius Nyerere, Antonia Darder, and Darlene Clover as well as indigenous philosophers like Lorna Williams, Marie Baptiste, and Vandana Shiva. From a gender perspective, this article is rooted in the work of postmodernist philosophers and critical ecological feminists like Maria Mies. The intersections of these are generally a holistic, human-centered perspective that breaks down intersectional, structural, and hegemonic oppression. We agree with Pheralli (2019) that education should "rupture societal conditions that reproduce structural violence and systemic inequalities" (p. 12).

International Benchmarks for Women's Education

This section introduces the interconnection between the sustainable development goals of gender and education and offers a critique of the language and targets that are couched in neoliberal discourse that frames education in economic terms rather than empowerment terms and consequently addresses the deeper, systemic, and power dimensions of gender. Finally, this section discusses power and society in terms of gender and education through a presentation of capability barriers that women face in Uganda.

The SDGs ratified in 2015 by all United Nations members represent a "universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030" (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). Crucially, the SDGs stress that development necessitates concentrated attention to overturning intersectional disadvantage and

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securing environmental sustainability and not just to economic growth. The SDGs accentuate that goal number 5 (gender equality) must be prioritized in all the 17 goals. This interconnection is evident in the language for the targets of goal number 4 (quality education) which include ensuring free, equitable, and quality primary education for all girls and boys; eliminating gender disparities in education; and ensuring equal access to all levels of education. The goal has a strong focus on equitable access to vocational and technical education, which has largely been identified as a key component of combating youth unemployment particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where there are sizable youth populations. Despite attention to quality of education in the language of the SDGs, the benchmarks remain focused on access to education as a function of achieving the targets of universal primary education (UPE), universal secondary education (USE), and vocational education and training (VET). The quality of learning experiences does not figure prominently in mainstream language around gender and education. Additionally, most literature avoids the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Uganda policy and practice are interconnected with international development policy, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious organizations, social and cultural imaginations, and economic conditions. Government policy on education and equal rights to education is driven by all these factors and a neoliberal agenda that increasingly leaves the task of education to NGOs and the private sector and prioritizes education for economic purposes. This neoliberalization of policy and economics places an unfair and a more significant burden on young people and poor people, especially girls and women (Pherali, 2019).

The World Bank and the UNDP favor measurements of access in the evaluation of country SDG targets. This discourse is highly influential and draws on the WID tradition, which focuses primarily on numbers. McGrath (2018) recounts that World Bank policy (and the WID position) has been dominant in education development and funding since the 1980s and rests on human capital theory. In this model, education is largely framed in terms of investment for economic productivity, and it is quantitatively measured in terms of enrollment rates in school. It therefore addresses important factors that inhibit girls from attending school, such as prioritizing boys' education, violence, sexual abuse, and lack of sanitation pads. These are important. Campaigns such as the Malala campaign have been valuable in influencing government policy and mainstreaming girls' rights to attend school.

Unfortunately, as Unterhalter (2014) points out, this language frames girls' education as an approach to improving the economy. This encourages negative interpretations of gender where the social role of women and girls is to serve men rather than having a right to fulfilling their own life ambitions. This is evident in mainstream discourse, for example, in *Her Education, Our Future* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019a). Another problem with this model is that it has not given enough attention to the quality of education, and the way in which gender inequalities are reproduced in education. Indeed, often countries feel they have met their gender targets because they have equal net enrollment rates. Research by Unterhalter and North (2011), for example, demonstrated that officials in Kenya and South Africa felt that they had largely achieved education for all targets because there were equal numbers of women enrolling in school.

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In the Uganda Education Sector Strategic Plan 2015–2020, despite quality education for all being named the priority of the core mission, there is only minor mention given to girl's education. Instead of monitoring the quality of girls education, the gender parity index continues the focus on access. Likewise, the UNDP (2015, 2017) reports on gender in Uganda insinuate a state of near gender equality in education because there is a 100% rate of girls enrollment in primary and 90% in secondary in relation to boys. Forcing people to attend school does not necessarily mean rupturing violent structural oppression. To be fair, the National Strategy for Girls Education (NSGE) 2015–2020 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013) acknowledges the importance of both quality of education as well as improved access for all, as stated in the SDG targets. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) recognizes that Uganda has the highest dropout rate among East African countries at 70% of which most are girls, and with higher rates in the North. The MoES (2019) acknowledges that patriarchal school systems and teaching methods are a big part of the problem, along with unqualified teachers, and has released a gender-responsive teaching guide for the use of all teachers which includes consideration for the differing experiences of girls and boys in school. In addition to changing the behavior of teachers, the document addresses the need for ensuring more women role models both as teachers and principals but also in textbooks and in curriculum review processes. It forms part of a campaign to encourage girls to enter STEM. Thus far, as Hawah Nabuye (2018) explains in her policy brief, there is insufficient training and support for implementation and consequently the initiative remains theoretical. The following sections describe what the barriers to girls are in school and suggest some approaches to teaching that can break the violence of patriarchy.

Capability Barriers in Education in Uganda

A colleague from Gulu University (Uganda) who wrote a dissertation in gender studies and is developing a gender studies program for the university had this to say about gender and education in Uganda:

> The reality is that there is no gender parity in education in Uganda. Societal expectations, preference for boys education, poverty, gender insensitivity in teaching and learning, lack of changing rooms for girls and female role models in schools, too much housework for girls that affects their concentration at school, labour in school for girls, gender and sexual based violence in schools, forced early marriage, privatisation of education at a high cost, lack of decent public schools, patriarchal teaching methods: These are some of the considerable problems contributing to gender inequity in northern Uganda.[1]

Jones's research (2011, 2015, 2019) in primary and secondary schools in northern Uganda Corroborates that there is very poor gender parity in education. Jones used participatory research methods to uncover some key findings that show schools as places of social reproduction and gender inequity. Her participants shared stories of domestic work, whereby girls are forced to clean, cook, and fetch water both in school and at home, while boys are encouraged to play soccer or have more time and energy to study. Girls also recounted sexual abuse and gender-based violence by teachers and fellow students, including regular public debasement. As a result, girls

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felt compelled to remain quiet because they felt it was safer not to be noticed. They also explained that they don't have equal access to resources such as textbooks or teachers' time and are encouraged to learn domestic duties rather than school subjects. These are all forced and structural conditions that physically reduce girls' capability to compete and succeed but also teaches them that this is normal condition and reduces their ability to dream and have life ambitions.

Normalization is learned experientially and through observation, including the hidden curriculum. Academics referring to both the Global North (Egbo, 2009) and the Global South (Marshall & Arnot, 2007) explain that a hidden curriculum reinforces social norms through the use of images and references to role models around the school and in textbooks, encouraging different career and study pathways, and encouraging different behavior both in and out of the classroom. Pereznieto, Marcus, Maclure, Archer, and Mdee (2018) demonstrate that women throughout sub-Saharan Africa are encouraged to follow particular career paths that ultimately deny them opportunities in the workforce. For example, women are often encouraged to be passive and enter professions such as tailoring and hairdressing, while men are encouraged to enter active social roles and become providers and decision-makers. When women then graduate, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBoS, 2019) explains their lack of employability in terms of limited jobs that women *can do*. Unlike the (often) explicit conditions of violence, extra work, and reduced access to resources, there is also a hidden curriculum embedded in Ugandan education that reinforces tacitly learned biological and social norms. This happens by normalizing and hiding structural oppression in schools.

Research by Muhunguzi, Bennet, and Muhunguzi (2011) in Uganda explain that heterosexual gendered sexualities emphasize male superiority over women and are prescribed from a young age in Ugandan society by church, family, school, and community. Women are taught to be submissive and nonsexual, while men are encouraged to be aggressive in their exploration of heterosexual sexual desires. This denies women's and nonheterosexual people's ability to explore their own sexuality, sexual pleasure, and relationships. It also creates perfect conditions for sexual abuse and violence. Girls and women in Muhanguzi et al.'s research reported high levels of sexual abuse and violence from males, including trusted adults (like teachers) in school and in the community. Boys and girls alike corroborated normative stories of male violence and abuse of girls. The youth and teachers in Muhanguzi et al.'s research explain that girls are generally punished for sexual encounters, even if forced. For example, girls are forced out of school if they get pregnant while perpetrators or partners continue their lives without concern. Moreover, because of the abuse, women and girls are more likely to contract sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, and when they do, they are labeled as being overly promiscuous and stigmatized. The respondents explain that sexual abuse is generally dismissed and ignored by teachers, family, church, community, and school administrators, making the entire social system structurally oppressive.

Sexual stigmatization is a major capability barrier for girls' and women's success in school and society, because it creates extraordinary power imbalances and oppression from a very young age and a base level of sexual exploration that plays such a large role in identity building, empowerment, and imaging capabilities. It teaches boys and men that they are superior and

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should dominate and lead women. Like any oppressor, they use psychological and violent means to maintain these perceptions. The violence is compounded when boys and men feel their social expectations of manhood and maleness are at risk. Research by Jones (2019) in northern Uganda, for example, used art-based inquiry to have schoolchildren draw and then discuss gender inequality in schools. Discussion on the drawings that depicted sexual abuse and gender-based violence elicited stories of males beating girls because they were afraid that the girls would perform better in exams, and because the girls would not succumb to their sexual advances. The result is that girls, to stay safe, generally try to remain quiet and unperceived by both fellow students and teachers. It must be remarked that boys face these patriarchal, cultural pressures to be macho, and their social status in society depends on it. Okello and Hovil (2007) explain how this leads to an identity crisis when the boys are unable to support their families and ultimately increases sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Their research demonstrates that this is accentuated in postconflict northern Uganda. Unfortunately, the instability and complexes that are nurtured in both girls and boys are most often manifested in sexual abuse, violence, and aggression toward women.

Additionally, in terms of sexuality, anything outside normative heterosexual relations is highly stigmatized. It is so taboo that research by Muhanguzi et al. (2011) is among the only literature in Uganda that even touches on the subject. She explains that teachers in school watch girls closely for any overtly sexual activity for fear that they are unable to control themselves and will become lesbians. This is another way in which girls' sexuality is monitored and repressed. Muhanguzi explains that boys do engage in sexual behavior with each other and more often with teachers. She explains that this is often a form of sexual abuse, in a system whereby males (especially teachers) use sex to dominate others psychologically. It is also a space where teachers (male and female) find opportunity to express their own repressed sexual desires. As with all sexual abuse, the victims generally do not report the crimes for fear of social exclusion and punishment by the teachers. In documenting weak support structures in schools, Muhanguzi identifies what can be described as institutionalized gaslighting. "Gaslighting" is a term used in psychology to describe how male perpetrators manipulate conditions to make women doubt that harassment is taking place, question their mental and emotional reactions, and shift their behavior.

Kate Abramson (2014) documents gaslighting as a form of torture. She cites the example of Simone de Beauvoir's (a prominent philosopher of the 20th century) memoirs, where she recalls sharing a manuscript with Sartre (also a prominent philosopher, and in an intimate relationship with de Beauvoir) that was important to her, and how he ripped it (and her soul) apart, until at the end she suggests that she sees reason and understands that her profound observations were wrong. Other examples include men manipulating social situations in the workplace and in personal relationships using power imbalances to address their own insecurities. Central to the concept is men needing to create an altered understanding for every one of the situations in which they have harassed the women to make it appear as though the woman's claims are unfounded and even insane, perhaps on the basis of her emotional and irrational condition of being a woman. This is different from simple manipulation. It is not enough for the perpetrator to have everyone around believe a scenario, but, rather, the victim and even the perpetrator himself need to believe it so that it becomes a fact.

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This is perhaps why gaslighting is a psychological condition. A necessary condition for gaslighting to occur is reinforcement by trusted people around the victim. Muhanguzi et al. (2011) share stories of how this occurs, through comments and insinuations by school administrators, peers, and community, such as "'you are just making a fuss,' 'faking words,' 'creating stories,' 'hates the teacher,' 'not interested in the teachers lessons' or 'badly behaved'" (p. 720). Because this permeates all levels of society, "gaslighting" is not encompassing enough a term, thus here it is adapted to "structural institutional gaslighting" to capture the depth of the psychosis and appropriately describe what is happening. This process is a central function of patriarchy. It is compounded by the authoritarian, patriarchal nature of schools and communities in northern Uganda, which beyond the sexual issues reinforces hierarchical order, listening and repetition, and following orders. Physical and psychological violence are used to maintain this severe power imbalance, tacitly reinforce a patriarchal ontology, and ultimately constrain the capabilities and life choices of women.

To shift such deep-set oppression, a completely new model of education is needed that can transgress the violence and transform society. Such an education model requires cracking open patriarchal power structures and demonstrating an alternative, more harmonious way of living together. Conradie and Robeyns (2013) suggest that a decent education should help people and groups transcend societal narratives and achieve their ambitions. They argue that a multitude of factors both overt and covert in school and out of school play a role in limiting individuals' (and collective) ambitions and what they are capable of aspiring to. They call these factors capability barriers. De Jaeghere (2018) builds on this to correlate women and girls' capability of aspirations to agency, freedoms, and achievements. She includes social, cultural, and economic factors in her model stating that education must help girls and women to imagine alternative futures. This is like Kabeer's perspective of education and empowerment. Kabeer (2005) argued that empowerment should be a central concern for education, and for this to happen greater attention needs to be given to what students are being taught and how they are being taught. It also requires helping boys and men to imagine these same futures by getting over their fear of vulnerability and becoming confident in themselves beyond mere appearances.

Colonial Discourse

As this article considers changing human rights and educational paradigms, there must also be caution to avoid the tendency to colonize. Rich and powerful nations have the habit of claiming epistemic and cultural superiority while undermining the epistemic and cultural sovereignty of anyone who thinks differently (Batiste, 2005). This is the trick of patriarchal world dominance which has brought our very world to the brink of extinction (Clover, 2002). Santos (2014) uses the term "epistemicide" to explain how Britain forcefully destroyed valuable and empowering models of education as a crucial element of domination. In its place, the British introduced their patriarchal systems of oppression and exploitation, at the heart of which were gender inequality and a school system designed to reproduce and reinforce inequality. Neocolonialism continues to use the same tactics to maintain world domination.

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This article has shared a critical perspective of gender inequality as it is manifested in education. In addition, it has suggested that rather than the World Bank model of human capital education, what is needed is a critical, empowering, and gender transformative model of education based on care for self and others and capable of transforming gender relations. The state of gender oppression in the 21st century is still largely caused by the imposition of colonial patriarchy based on a cultural ethic of war and selfish greed. In their recent article, Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Petersen (2017) argue that western European research and learning paradigms are based on fundamentally different ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies, and as a result they are not helpful to Africa. They are critical of the western European colonial scientific knowledge paradigm and how it has been used to justify the barbaric violence of colonialism. They elaborate on the fundamental difference between European individualist ontologies (I think therefore I am) and a common relational indigenous paradigm (I am because we are) that "requires respect of all things living and non-living" (p. 328). They propose an African epistemology based in connectedness and spirituality that "promotes harmony and balance as well as critical inquiry and fearless aspirations for new paradigms. . . . Deriving its assumptions from the 'weness' and 'usness' and the I/we relationship" (p. 328). In alignment with Chilisa et al., this article also argues that discussions of education and gender should not be an imposition but rather the West should release its epistemic ego. No matter how much gender rights are discussed, it is only when patriarchal systems both local and global are truly dismantled that change can begin. Talking of human rights while dropping bombs and colonizing others is a dilemma that simply cannot be mediated. So, as work to address gender rights in specific spaces occurs, this work should not be condescending and reproduce the patriarchal and epistemic violence of the past.

Gender Transformation as a Way Forward

Gender-based oppression, in all the forms it assumes, is reinforced through static and normative rhetoric, which does not address the deep-set structural power dimensions of gender. Educational institutions are important sites where social constructions of gender are manifested and learned explicitly and implicitly. The gender sensitivity approach in education does not go far enough to engage the problem of gender oppression. As an alternative, this article suggests that a gender transformative approach to education is necessary to reorient the discourse around gender in such a way that it can better mitigate the effects of gender oppression. It is therefore recommended that Uganda embrace a gender transformative approach. As a reminder:

Gender Sensitive = "Acknowledging the different needs and constraints of women and men without changing the status quo."

Gender Transformative = "Addressing gender imbalances, changing gendered power relations, and actively building equitable social norms and structures."

Simone de Beauvoir (1997, pt. 2) presents a darkly compelling narrative of "unhappiness" as a state one is born into; a state that is already created and functioning; a state that might be referred to as *given*. The child, unable to participate in the construction of a world that "appears to him as an absolute," believes the only choice for existence in this *given* world is to "submit." In this case, submission means acceptance of one's inability to act on the world; with submission

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comes a life that may include various activities like playing and being carefree, but something remains *off* for the reader, especially when it becomes clear *not* that the child does not experience what one might think of as freedom but that the child *does not* have a conceptualization of what it means to be free. Perhaps for the child, the possibility of freedom comes with adulthood where the child now man becomes a master in the *given* world, but what of those who do not or cannot become adult, thereby achieving master status? Speaking to this de Beauvoir (1997) writes:

> There are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads. Like the child, they can exercise their freedom, but only within this universe which has been set up before them, without them. (p. 37)

What should not be read here from de Beauvoir is empathy for those "kept in a state of servitude and ignorance" living in a world that "has been set up before them, without them." In fact, de Beauvoir goes on to present a problematic and apologist argument about the U.S. enslavement of black people and Western women's continued oppression under patriarchy. Nevertheless, this story remains useful because it allows this article (a) to circle back to the idea that began it, namely, "one is not born, rather one becomes a woman" due to social programming; (b) the narrative of the child challenges the reader to confront the barriers to freedom in a *given* world; and finally (c) de Beauvoir's narrative takes the reader—even if it is in roundabout manner—to the heart of the issue of how gender has been thus far approached in the context of education in Uganda. Like de Beauvoir, the government of Uganda and education practitioners see and acknowledge the way that gender exclusion and gender-based violence negatively impact the lives of women and girls. Efforts designed to mitigate the impact of these things—like the introduction of gender-sensitive pedagogy—treat the symptom of patriarchy; it does put forth a cure. Finding a cure for the givenness of patriarchy that affects generations of those who become women in Uganda (and the world) is the issue this article challenges an interdisciplinary group of scholar-activists to take up; this article suggests gender transformative pedagogy as a good place to begin.

Acknowledgments

We dedicate this article to all the little African girls who carry babies and jerry cans instead of backpacks and books. May the weight of gender be lifted from your precious bodies; may you one day be free.

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Notes

1. Ugandan colleague working in higher education who wishes to remain anonymous.

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