

Male Gender Activists at a Kenyan University: Renouncing or reinforcing privilege?

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Abstract

The Female Students League is a university student club promoting gender equity on and off campus and providing a forum for students to discuss gender issues. About half of the members and leaders are men. From impassioned belief in gender equity to the desire to develop public-speaking skills, the varying motivations and backgrounds of the men are analyzed in this ethnographic study. The men grew up with two parents who modeled either gender equity or extreme inequity/abuse or with strong and capable single mothers. Apart from occasional criticisms from other men on campus, the male participants have many positive incentives to join the League. Tensions between and among men and women over the appropriate role of men in the League illuminate the way young people negotiate gender during a time of rapid social change. The project uses ethnographic methods to explore the construction of gender through the intersection of individual agency, institutional structures, and social context. Recognizing the dynamic and contradictory elements of gender, this study explores evolving understandings of gender among young men, and the consequences of the choices they make within their societal framework, with its constraints and possibilities.

I spent last year teaching at a Kenyan university. While I was there I was going to do some research on gender and education; the study I had planned was on high school students and academic achievement. I was affiliated with the Center for Women and Gender Studies at the university and I started going to the weekly coffee hours organized by a student club called the Female Students League. During these events, about twenty to fifty students gathered to discuss controversial topics like abortion; sometimes they invited guest speakers to talk on issues related to gender. I was really surprised to see that on many days, men outnumbered women among the participants, although women outnumbered men as dues-paying members of the club. Then I became one of the faculty advisors to the group and gradually learned that men weren't just coming to events, they were also planning them, writing articles for the magazine, collecting funds for scholarships for girls, and taking leadership roles in the club. While I was pleased to see men taking such an active role in promoting gender equity, I also had questions about their motivations: were they acting in their own self-interest or truly committed to the cause? In order to understand these men better, I decided to use my time there to research their participation.

Once I returned to the US and easy access to scholarly literature, I was curious to know whether the young men I got to know in Kenya were anomalous and if not, what other researchers have learned about male gender activists. The literature on men and feminism/gender activism starts with questions about whether men can be feminists (Jardine and Smith 1987). I also found many narratives of individual men and their feminism/gender activism (Digby 1998, Pease 2000) and some descriptions of groups of

men advocating for gender justice (Kimmel 1998), but little on mixed groups. Antisexist or profeminist men's groups have existed in US and Europe since the 1980's (Connell 1998). While there are some groups of men that have a commitment to gender justice in general, for example the National Organization of Men against Sexism (Kimmel 1998), most feminist men's groups work specifically to combat rape, domestic violence, and/or HIV/AIDS (Foubert, Kaufman 2001, Peacock 2003, Stoltenberg, Wainaina 2003, Welsh).

It seems accepted that when men work to combat sexism, they should do so with men to influence other men. For example, Kimmel sees pro-feminist men's responsibility as making feminism "comprehensible to men" (1998: 67, see also May 1998); he doesn't address the possibility that men have a role to play in making feminism comprehensible to women.

In the US and Europe, some feminisms have advocated separatism, which implies that men can and should play only a restricted role within feminism. While I don't want to imply any philosophical continuity from a generalized "Africa" to a generalized "African-America", I was intrigued to learn that some African and African American feminist/womanists have claimed a somewhat different role for men in achieving gender justice. As early as 1984, bell hooks said that men and women have to work together to end sexism. In 1998, she said, "Since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they can be successfully eradicated only if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole" (278).

While asserting the pluralism of African feminisms, Nnaemeka does identify some common features which distinguish African feminism from Western feminism, one of which is that African feminism “invites men as partners in problem solving and social change” (1998:8). Similarly Aina (1998), Chukurere (1998), and Kolawole (1997) also suggest that unlike Western feminists, African feminists/womanists want to work with men to achieve gender justice.

Michael Awkward (1998) and Gary Lemons (1998) are affirmative about the ability of African American men to be feminist/womanist, although Awkward in particular recognizes some potential difficulties: “interactions between men and women motivated by male self-interest (such as necessarily characterizes an aspect of male participation in feminism) are fraught with possible dangers of an enactment of or a capitulation to hegemonic male power for the biological/ideological female body” (1998: 162).

Awkward’s two main concerns, men acting in their own self-interest and men reinforcing their own power within a patriarchal system, are both issues I saw with the men in the League.

Kandiyoti (1994) has similar concerns about “enlightened” men in the Middle East who denounce practices like polygamy which they see as sexist. “I had misgivings about the deeper motivations of male reformers and wondered if they were being self-serving by manifestly bemoaning the subjection of women while in fact rebelling against their own lack of emancipation from communal and in, particular, paternal control” (197) While

she found some ambiguities she also found “a genuine desire for contestation and change” (212).

Gender and development

In the development industry, men’s involvement in promoting gender equity is seen as a necessity. In 2003 the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women hosted an expert group meeting on “the Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality” which was followed in 2004 by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women session on the same topic. The United Nations documents make reference to men’s groups and also to men and women working together. They caution against diverting resources away from women and girls towards men and boys.

African men and change

Studies of men in Africa have explored a variety of masculinities and the ways those are shaped and changed (Lindsay and Miescher 2003, Morrell 2001, Ouzgane and Morrell 2005). Of particular relevance to this study is Lindsay and Miescher’s assertion that in Africa there can be more than one hegemonic masculinity.

Even when researchers have identified more than one hegemonic masculinity, they are usually masculinities that shore up patriarchy. For example, Pattman did two studies of college students, one in Botswana (2005) and one in Zimbabwe (2001). In each setting,

there were at least two masculine identities available to the students, but all of them were sexist.

On the other hand Silberschmidt (2005) describes some “alternative masculinities” in East Africa. She found that most men were responding to diminishing economic opportunities by resorting to physical violence against women, but that some rural men were doing women’s work in the fields with their wives and some well-educated urban men see their wives as almost their equals. These more egalitarian relationships echo those among the educated elite of the Mau Mau who had companionate marriages which included men doing domestic chores and women fighting (White 2003). In contemporary Nigeria, men are a “sizable proportion” of the feminist group Women in Nigeria (Iweriebor 1998: 314).

Setting—gender and education in Kenya.

I’m not sure how familiar you are with Kenya, so let me first give you some background about gender and education. Numerous campaigns promoting education for girls and discouraging early marriage have been quite successful. Kenya has just about achieved gender parity in primary and secondary school enrollment, but not in outcomes.

University admission depends entirely on an exam taken at the end of secondary school. Boys perform much better than girls on this exam and thus only about 30% of university students are women. Due to overcrowding, students have to wait two years after completing secondary school before they can start university, so most students are about

20 years old when they start. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women are less likely to complete university than men. Some are already mothers when they begin university or have children while enrolled. Due to a lack of services, they often drop out. Sexual harassment and rape are prevalent on campus; there is poor security, little prosecution of offenders, and victims are stigmatized. Most male students expect that their girlfriends will do household chores for them. In the university, as in the country in general, gender bias is pronounced, but strongly contested.

The Center for Women and Gender Studies was formed at the university as a result of female students' complaints about sexual harassment. The Center sponsors the Female Students League, a club responsible for outreach on and off campus. The League, as most students refer to it, organizes the coffee hours I mentioned, an orientation for new students, a campus-wide gender awareness day, outreach trips to local high schools. They also publish a magazine and raise money for scholarships for girls.

There is variation among the male and female members in terms of their views of appropriate gender roles. Some of the men are more committed to equality than some of the women. At the Coffee Hour on International Women's Day, a heated discussion turned into a debate between one man, Jonathon, who was eloquent about empowering women in order to help the whole society, and Gladys, who took an essentialist stance, "Men are strong to protect us. Why is our back like this?" She bent her forward to show her flexibility, "In order to do women's work" (3/05). The League does not require its members to subscribe to any particular view of gender, which makes for an open and

engaging environment. As Nnaemeka recommends when confronting conflicts within feminism, allow “difference to be and in its *being* create the power that energizes *becoming*” (1998: 3).

Methods

I spent nine months (September 2004-May 2005) as a participant-observer with the League, attending all the events I just mentioned and also attending planning meetings for those events. In addition, early in my time at the university I participated in a three day gender mainstreaming training with most of the league members. The workshop was put on by the World Bank Association, not the league, but it provided an excellent opportunity for me to get to know the league members and hear their views on gender. English is the language of instruction in Kenyan schools and universities and it is often used by students amongst themselves. Kiswahili often supplements English conversations and speeches, and sometimes speeches or plays are entirely in Kiswahili; I understand basic Kiswahili.

I also interviewed nine men (four leaders in the league and five members). Their ages at the time of the interview ranged from 21-26. I interviewed five third year students, two fourth-year students and two second-year students from a variety of fields: humanities, social science, education, science. I tape-recorded and later transcribed the interviews. In the interviews, I asked open-ended questions about the onset, extent, and consequences of

the student's involvement in the League and I asked about the student's family and upbringing.

Terminology

Before I share some of my findings, let me mention that in Kenya, the word "gender" is used as a shorthand for progress towards gender equity or what most people in the US would call feminism. For example, a student told me, "In the village, people are afraid of gender." Clearly he did not mean people are afraid of socially constructed roles for men and women, but rather that people are afraid of changing gender roles. At the university, people also use the term "Gender" as shorthand for the Center for Women and Gender Studies, as in "I'll see you at Gender after class." "Gender sensitive" refers to men, women, or institutions which are aware of gender issues and treat men and women equitably. "Ladies" is usually used to refer to women, even by gender-sensitive men and women.

Background/upbringing of male league members

University admissions in Kenya are highly selective; only about one-fourth of high school students go on to university and only about 5% of all students of university age attend university (MOEST). Like many university students, most of the League members attended elite high schools, so they are positioned to move up the class ladder even if they were from "humble backgrounds" as one student put it. While I don't have any

comparative data on the university students in general, I perceived a social class distinction between the league members and other university students. In terms of their self-presentation--clothing, hair styles, way of talking—they are the more urban of the university students. When I asked Juma to describe the typical male league member, he said, “Most of them are from urban areas. Even the ladies themselves.”

Considering the intersection of gender and class among the men in the League suggests grounds for hope for the future: men who are likely to be leaders of the country are becoming gender sensitive. On the other hand, as I’ll discuss more later on, the men who are involved in the League may use their gender activism to their advantage in seeking jobs or leadership positions. Thus their gender activism is shoring up their class position. Connell uses the term “patriarchal dividend” to refer to the privilege that men receive in a patriarchal society. Ironically, even as they work to diminish the patriarchal dividend, the men in the League appear to be poised to receive both the patriarchal dividend and a class dividend.

In terms of their upbringing and the gender roles in their family, the men fall into three groups: men who grew up with two parents who provided role models for gender equity; men who grew up with single mothers who required them to take responsibility for household chores; and men who grew up with parents whose marriages were sexist and/or abusive. In the first two groups, the men grew up in households where gender roles were not clearly defined and they as boys did traditionally woman’s work like cooking and cleaning. Also, their sisters were given resources and opportunities for

education. In her experience with male gender activists in Kenya, Wainaina also found that “Young men who have been brought up in environments where equality is the norm are less likely to be threatened by gender equality” (2003: 8).

The men whose parents were role models for gender equity had fathers who to a greater or lesser extent were committed to gender equity. Barasa said, “There were times when my dad would prepare us lunch, if my mom was away. He was a little bit enlightened about gender.” On the other hand, Peter’s father “liked doing everything himself. Cooking, cleaning. He’s the one who taught me to cook ...He had strong opinions. If one person is busy, then the other person should step in and do what needs to be done.”

Those with single mothers were inspired by the strength of their mothers. Jonathon described how he and his siblings relied on his mother. “We had to eat, sleep, it’s Mum. Go to school, it’s Mum. She dropped out of school but she put all the kids through school. I see the potential of women.” Partly due to necessity and partly due to beliefs, the men in this group also did “women’s work” in the home. George said, “I can cook, I can clean. I *do* cook, wash, clean the house. We’ve been brought up thinking we are equal.”

Those who grew up with sexist parents came to identify with the burdens or misery of their mothers. Gideon grew up in a rural area. “All the work, cooking, washing, done by my mother. We are all going to the farm, but when we come back our mother is the one to cook. She’s exhausted, but she has to cook, while we rest in the sitting room. Now, I

can even look for firewood. I can even collect water. We can't allow people around us to see that I cook. Our dad views it negatively. He's not happy to find us cooking. Our society is changing. I want this change to be accelerated." Stephen alluded to domestic violence between his parents, who separated when he was a child. "Most people who grew up with single mothers seem to understand more about gender issues. People who have grown up in families with violence get what you are talking about." Witnessing suffering due to sexism seems to be a strong motivator to get involved with gender activism. At the Gender Mainstreaming Workshop several of the men in attendance spoke eloquently about the abuse their mothers had suffered. Stoltenberg (1998) writes about a male student group at Duke University that works to end sexual violence. He says that all of the members know victims of sexual violence. At a coffee hour discussion of women and work, one man said he would share household duties with his wife. "I saw [the opposite] with my mother and my grandmother. She would go and get firewood and get home and my grandfather would be taking it easy with his buddies" (Mar 05). Several of the men I interviewed who grew up in more egalitarian families also witnessed domestic violence and/or women's double burden of work in other families in their community. So the men in the League brought with them childhood experiences of gender equity or gender bias or both.

Motivations

When I first started going to League events, I wondered what motivated the men to come and whether their attendance implied a sincere commitment to gender equity. Coffee

Hour was the entry point for all the men, then some of them went on to get more involved and participate in other League activities. Through my observations and interviews I identified five reasons that men come to Coffee Hour. As I'll discuss, most of the men identified more than one reason they were involved.

Very few events on campus involve free food, so a cup of instant coffee and a few dry cookies is actually an incentive. Here Stephen recounts how he first came to coffee hour. "A course mate came to me and she said can you come with me and have some coffee. And it's true I was feeling a bit hungry. It was cold and I said, if I can get some nice warm coffee, I don't mind. So that's how I ended up. I drank coffee, I really enjoyed, I ate biscuits."

A personal invitation was the key for seven of the nine men I interviewed, including Stephen above. The other two came in response to flyers and the new student orientation. Many of the league members spent time together socially; I often saw them together on campus.

Once they came to the Coffee Hour for the first time, they found a unique forum for discussion and debate, which attracted four of the nine men. Gideon said, "Discussion is about all the contemporary issues that affect our lives. As we discuss, everyone brings some views. We can learn from each other. It has really helped me." Almost all classes at the university are lecture classes, and there are very few opportunities on campus for students to discuss contemporary issues. The usual format for coffee hour is that the

students in charge for the day announce the topic, for example domestic violence, and give a few questions related to the topic. Then they break the students into groups, each group discusses for fifteen minutes or so and then a representative from each group reports their conclusions. This format is standard in American university classrooms, but very rare in Kenya. Students all have a chance to participate in their small groups and then a few have the chance to speak in public.

I think that perhaps some men came to Coffee Hour to meet women. Remember that women are in the minority on campus and very few in number in some fields.

Occasionally, Coffee Hour had a feeling of a singles club. For example, in one session where there were very few men and they were sitting together, the female student leading the meeting said “If you’re sitting next to a *jamaa* (guy), I’ll give you a biscuit.” Then as she passed out biscuits, she said to two women sitting with a man between them, “Are you two sharing this man today?” Everyone laughed (3/05). For another example, at the first coffee hour to welcome the new first-year students, the student leaders told everyone to introduce themselves with their name, some other information about themselves, and whether they were single (1/05). In the interviews, when I asked the men why they joined, none of them told me that it was to meet women. When I asked in general if men join to meet women, they said that happens sometimes. If men are joining in order to meet women, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they aren’t committed to gender equity. Apparently, they want to meet feminist women, which doesn’t seem to be the norm on campus. According to Chris, many men on campus “don’t want their girlfriends to go to Gender.”

Finally, are men really motivated to join because of their commitment to gender equity? As I talked to the men, I realized that they got committed to gender equity through their involvement with the League, not vice versa. With the exception of two students, the rest told me that gender issues were not important to them before coming to university. Some of them had concerns about the position of women in society, but they lacked the framework to analyze and challenge bias. When I asked Juma if gender issues were important to him before coming to university, he replied, “They were important, but I had not known they were gender issues.” While I was initially curious to find out if the men in the League were genuinely committed to gender equity or not, through talking with the men I came to see that I was imposing my own misguided and dichotomous conceptual framework. I thought I was going to find out which of the men were sincere and selfless in their participation, but I learned that they developed their understanding of and commitment to gender equity through their participation. Most of the men talked about learning from the League events. Stephen talked explicitly about how he has changed personally through being involved with the League. “When I came here, I still had the mentality that boys belong to boys and girls belong to girls. That gender thing wasn’t really part of me. I have some friends that joke that the person I am now is not the person they knew in first year. They ask, ‘what really happened?’” Now, I conceptualize the League as a site for learning about gender bias and gender equity and for fostering a commitment to gender equity.

Negative and positive consequences:

The men who are involved with the League experience mostly positive consequences as a result of their participation. The only negative consequence any of the interviewees identified was being mocked or judged by some but not all of their peers. Kimmel describes the way many men question his masculinity after he lectures in support of feminism (1998), and Juma had a very similar experience. When I asked Juma how others on campus feel about his involvement with the League, he replied, “Others say we are wasting time. Others say we are women. Especially because of that name, Female Students League, especially because of our t-shirts. One time I came in late to class wearing the t-shirt. Everybody was seated and said, ‘Hey what’s that? Are you a woman?’ You know me, I’m not afraid of crowds, so I went up there and said, ‘Who doubts my manhood? If you are doubting my manhood, come, I prove to you I am a man.’” While Juma’s masculinity was challenged, he did not seem bothered by the challenge and perhaps with the passage of time, seemed pleased with his bold response. While seven of the nine students have had other students question or criticize them for their involvement with the League, none of them told me about any severely negative repercussions like being ostracized, beaten up or losing a friend.

Gender equity is seen as a Euro-American imposition, as un-African, by some on campus. Several male participants at the Gender Mainstreaming Workshop also raised this concern, but the participants at the workshop included university student leaders who were not affiliated with the League. “One response to [gender instability], on the part of groups whose power is challenged but still dominant, is to reaffirm *local* gender orthodoxies and hierarchies (Connell 1998: 17). Due to this dynamic, some of the men in

the League are being labeled as un-African by their peers. Barasa said, “On the basis of the African customs, they have always thought that men are superior. If they kind of see that you are trying to balance towards that side of trying to fight for women’s rights, they see you as a misfit.”

Despite the negative responses from some peers, all of the interviewees have some friends who also go to Coffee Hour. Peter said, “I’ve recruited most of my friends to Gender. It’s like they think it’s cool. It has a cool feeling around college. So when I say, ‘I’m going to Gender,’ they say, ‘what does it really do and then you explain to them, coffee hour, we have debates, and then they want to come.’”

In addition to providing a social network, the League also offers opportunities for developing public speaking, performance, and leadership skills. Once or twice a year the League organized an outreach trip to a local high school. I went on one trip to a nearby girls’ school. For about three hours, all 600 of the high school students were crammed into a hall that would have comfortably held about 200. The theme was “career choices” and male and female League members gave speeches, did skits, and answered questions. The high school students seemed very appreciative of the university students’ interest in them and their futures, but I think the highlight was at the end when the male League members put some music on the boom box they brought and danced. The girls went wild, as if they were in the presence of rock stars. Talking about a similar trip, Stephen said, “It was exceptionally good. The reception was wonderful. Talking to those young girls, the enthusiasm they showed.” On the one trip I went on, there were about seven male

university students and only three female ones. Apparently other trips have been more balanced, but I can speculate that the men may feel more appreciated on these trips than the women, which would encourage them to participate more.

The outreach trip provided a kind of hero worship, and it also provided a venue for creative performance, which is rare on campus. Peter is getting a degree in natural resource management, but he told me that he likes to do mass-media through theater. Most of the public League events include creative expressions of gender issues through poems, songs, and plays. For example, the League held an orientation for new university students. The highlight of the evening was a safe sex skit written and performed by two of the male students. They were dressed up as and acting like two old men from the village who were recounting the sad tale of a young man from the village who went to the big city. They used a traditional storytelling style, echoing each other and involving the audience, but with contemporary touches. The hero meets a young woman who is “so beautiful she makes all the beautiful women in the audience look like photocopies of beauty.” Through metaphor, they told how he becomes sexually promiscuous, contracts HIV/AIDS and dies. For at least twenty minutes, they had the audience of about 1000 students totally mesmerized and participating.

When I began the research, I wondered if the men participated in the League because they thought it would help them professionally. I speculated that these men are working to build a society that is more equitable in terms of gender equity, but a society in which they would be privileged because of their gender-sensitivity/expertise in gender.

However, when I asked the men about their career plans, none of their responses clearly

supported this conclusion. About half of them told me a field and then added that gender would be relevant to their work. The other half did not mention gender when I first asked about their future career, but when I prompted them as to whether gender would be relevant to their career, they answered affirmatively.

In general, the men promote women's rights and opportunities for instrumental reasons, saying that educating women is good for the whole society. Barasa is explicit about potential personal benefits in addition to social benefits,

We all form a society and we have to see that that society is for all of us.

Any effort that does not exploit anyone is for the benefit of the society.

When we are fighting for women's rights and advocating for our ladies to study hard and rise high in academic fields, it is for the sake of us. I don't know whether if my brother or someone from home will get married and I'll get a sister from here. If I created a proper environment for my sister I've also made an opportunity for someone close to me. We are doing this not for the ladies alone but for the best of this society.

Juma is even more direct about the potential material gain to him, "I cannot afford to go for someone who has not gone to university." While I did not perceive any conscious calculation of personal benefit, certainly one consequence of the League's efforts to promote education for girls and women is that there is a larger pool of educated women for them to marry.

The men are at times impassioned about dealing with gender inequity. One problem on campus is that during registration at the beginning of each semester, women end up waiting in line for days, because men push to the front. Some of the men are trying to organize a separate line for women to register, which indicates a willingness to experience at least a small diminution of their own privilege. In general though, their commitment to gender equity is not tested by many adverse consequences. It's refreshing to see the many rewards that accrue to male gender activists.

Implications

Connell (2002) uses the term "gender regime" to refer to the gender patterns of a particular organization or institution. The gender regime of the League was, like many gender regimes, contradictory. In some aspects I saw gender equity being promoted within the League and in other aspects not. Participants sometimes explicitly addressed conflicts about the gender regime of the League. The issue of the relative numbers of men and women and the appropriate role of men in League leadership caused some tensions. When choosing students to attend the three day gender mainstreaming workshop, there was some discussion at a League meeting about whether there should be equal numbers of men and women. The director suggested giving priority to League members who had paid dues, which would have meant more women would be invited. A male student said, "We should have balance because traditionally men are supposed to take care of women and protect them—we need to train them on that" (Sept 04). He seemed to be suggesting that men need to be educated about gender equity.

When holding elections for student officers, a male student suggested that for each position (chairperson, assistant chairperson), “Let’s have one man and one lady” (Sept 04). This suggestion was not acted upon and of the eleven officers subsequently elected, three were men, and they were elected to less powerful positions. In the interview, Stephen said, “During elections, people were complaining that men are coming in and overtaking. But the more men we get, that’s the beginning of change. But that doesn’t mean you have to leave the female students aside.” Yet the potential is there for men to “overtake” the leadership of the League. At a satellite campus where I was invited to the inauguration of their Gender League, all of the elected officers were men except for the treasurer. Reserving leadership positions for women will not be enough to guarantee them a leadership role. In Odame’s (2002) study of women’s groups in Kenya, she found that although men are not supposed to hold executive positions, they are sometimes de facto leaders, usually when their wives are the elected leaders.

Sometimes women and the purpose of the league are made invisible: the prime example is the widespread use of the term “League” instead of Female Students League. Another example is that one time when I came into the Center, Martin was making a flyer for the girl child education fund. The flyer read: “Donate 10 shillings and help a student be like you,” meaning a university student, but the flyer did not specify that the fund was only for girls (1/05).

Because men are so involved in the League, women do not have a women-only group or space, with the exception of female students who are parents; they have a weekly support group. I do not know whether the absence of a women's group is problematic. A limitation of my study is that I did not interview the women in the League about their perceptions of the involvement in the League.

The League is a site where gender is contested and reshaped but it can also be a site where gender inequalities are reinforced. For example, during Coffee Hour women usually (but not always) prepare, serve and clean up the refreshments. Cornwall and Lindisfarne point out that “Gendered difference and inequality are negotiated and recreated *more or less* in repeated interactions.... The accumulation of experience can introduce new social forms and meanings into apparently conventional situations” (1994: 44). I would add that the converse is also true: the accumulation of experience can reinforce existing social forms and meanings in apparently *unconventional* situations. In addition to the refreshments, another problematic area is that the outreach trips to motivate high school girls to strive for higher education reinforce a perspective that women and/or girls are the cause of their own problems—as in not working hard enough in school. Barasa, discussing his rural community, articulates this viewpoint when he said “We have been educating our women and girls but ladies have not worked as hard as men. That has left the conception that only men are perfect in academics, but it's only that ladies don't show their prowess.” The outreach program itself may reinforce this view, not only among the high school students, but also among the university students. On the other hand, the other League activity which seeks to promote academic

achievement for girls is fund-raising for scholarships. This activity, unlike the outreach programs, does acknowledge the structural, institutional, and societal causes of girls' underachievement in education.

Conclusion

Working with the Female Students League as one of their advisors, I was impressed by the energy and courage of the young men and women who were giving many hours of their time to challenge gender bias in their society. I was surprised to see so many men involved with the League, and through my research I wanted to find out about their background, motivation, and commitment to gender equity. I wondered whether the men were motivated by self-interest or truly committed to gender equity. As I analyzed my field notes and interview transcripts, I came to see that the League is the site for students to learn about gender issues and develop an identity as gender activists. The men do benefit from their involvement in the League, but those benefits keep them coming back, questioning social norms, and recreating gender.

Interview schedule

Name

Contact information

Major/Field

Year in school

Age

When did you first get involved with the League?

What year were you then?

Do you remember what motivated you to first get involved?

Were gender issues important to you before coming to Egerton?

How involved are you? Attend all/most coffee hrs, attend other activities, plan activities...

What do others on campus feel about your involvement with League?

Is gender included in courses?

Do you have other opportunities on campus to have discussions like at Coffee Hour?

Tell me about your family

Parental education/gender roles in family

Where did you grow up?

Rural, suburban, urban

Where did you go to high school?

Boys/Mixed; Boarding/Day

What are your plans for the future?

Career/personal/gender

What do you think of the name "Female Students League"?

Do you have any other comments about the League, the Center, or gender issues on campus?

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