The Politics of Female Adolescent Sexuality: Perceptions, Conceptualizations and Experiences of Transactional Teacher-Student Sexual Relationships in Northern Beninois Secondary Schools

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the Center for International Studies of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Kristina N. Séne
June 2010
© 2010 Kristina N. Séne. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis titled

The Politics of Female Adolescent Sexuality: Perceptions, Conceptualizations and Experiences of Transactional Teacher-Student Sexual Relationships in Northern Beninois Secondary Schools

by

KRISTINA N. SENE

has been approved for
the Center for International Studies by

______________________________

Stephen Howard
Professor of African Studies

______________________________

Thomas A. Smucker
Director, International Development Studies

______________________________

Daniel Weiner
Executive Director, Center for International Studies
Abstract
SENÉ, KRISTINA N., M.A., June 2010, International Development Studies

The Politics of Female Adolescent Sexuality: Perceptions, Conceptualizations and Experiences of Transactional Teacher-Student Sexual Relationships in Northern Beninois Secondary Schools (187 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Stephen Howard

Legally, education in Benin is open and equally available to all children. Yet, the retention rate of girls transitioning from primary to secondary school lags drastically behind that of boys. Much research has identified economic, socio-cultural and environmental barriers girls face in accessing education. However, the literature is insufficient on factors that endanger girl students once they enter the classroom. The most pervasive and potentially harmful of these obstacles is a school environment plagued by sexual interactions between teachers and students. This study contributes ethnographic work which provides space for participants’ voice and agency, and examines community-based understandings of teacher-student sexual relationships in a secondary school in northwestern Benin. The findings of this study suggest that poverty, unequal power relationships, and low levels of policy awareness influence transactional teacher-student sexual relationships. A deeper exploration of adolescent female sexuality is essential in fully understanding these relationships.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Stephen Howard
Professor of African Studies
Preface

From 2006-2008, I served as an Peace Corps education volunteer living and teaching in a small, rural community in northwestern Benin, a small francophone country in West Africa with the unfortunate reputation of having one of the widest gender education gaps in the world (UNDP, 2007; Wible, 2005). The secondary school or Collège d’Enseignement Général (CEG) where I was posted served the greater part of the region and suffers from one of the widest gender education gaps in the country (Annuaire Statistique, 2006; Tingbe-Azalou, 2005). Other than the school secretary, I was the only female on staff, and I taught on average sixty to seventy-five students per class, of which only four to seven were female with ages ranging from 12 to 26-years-old.

Throughout my service, I witnessed acts of sexual harassment of female students by fellow male students, teachers, and school administrators. Male teachers would often tease the “vulnerable” female minority during class and outside of the classroom, hissing them over to the teachers’ lounge, making gestures of appreciation for the girls’ bodies, or openly inviting them over to their homes for “extra-curricular” activities or work. Additionally, however, I also observed female students making advances towards their teachers, coyly lowering their eyes, giggling, and offering to come over after school to clean their teachers’ homes or cook meals on the weekends.

Both this intimidation and the distractions caused by open flirting between teachers and students, disrupted classroom dynamics and negatively affected classroom participation and academic achievement. On a regular basis male and female students

---

1 Translates as College of General Studies, which is the official name of all public secondary (middle and/or high) schools in Benin.
informed me of disturbing incidents of girls being coerced into having sex with teachers in exchange for the grades their work merited or of “lazy” students receiving grades their work did not merit because of their sexual compliance. There were numerous cases of pregnancy among the female students which were rumored to have been fathered by male faculty members and it was commonplace to hear teachers openly discussing female students they wanted to pursue both on school grounds in the teacher’s faculty lounge or outside of school in local restaurants and bars.

I wondered what was being done to protect girls from these behaviors, relationships and interactions. After some investigative work, I found out, to my relief, that the school director directly preceding my arrival had had a plan to limit inappropriate teacher-student relationships. However, his “plan” was not exactly what I had imagined, as it simply required all girls to shave their heads in order to limit the attention they would receive from male teachers and students. This seemingly extreme and misguided decision, I later discovered, merely complied with the then current, 1988 Ministry of Education policy that punished girls for “provoking teachers” and causing sexual temptation/provocation. The basis of the law claimed that the girl students’ hair-dos provoked sexual harassment and that it was the girls’ responsibility to eliminate this provocation. This “blame the victim” mentality was the pre-2006 status quo in sexual harassment school policy across Benin, but remains prevalent in the sexual harassment discourse throughout the country. Then and now, in the rare circumstances that an educator is convicted of sexual harassment, the biggest threat an offender faces is relocation to another school, in another community.
Despite all of these troubling incidents, my most disturbing observation came several months into my service when I found out that the teacher-student sexual relationships that I had heard about and observed were not at all unique or contained within my community as I had naively hoped. This idealist perception of the scope of the problem was promptly shattered when, during our first Peace Corps in-service training session, all twenty-one education volunteers who were posted throughout the country shared similar experiences and observations, ranging in severity, but all demonstrating an alarming degree of teacher-student sexual interaction. The issue of teachers engaging in inappropriate behaviors with students appeared to be endemic to the schools of Benin regardless of location.

In spite of all of the wonderful people I met, friends I made, and experiences I shared in my community, my immeasurably rewarding Peace Corps service also irreversibly changed the way I looked at the girl child’s place in Benin’s education system. After my time spent in Benin as a teacher and volunteer and then later as a researcher, I wanted to know why the abundant social programming aimed at encouraging girls to continue their studies into the secondary level had not generated theories and studies focused on the safety of the classroom environment for girls, despite widespread perceptions that schools were not safe. Considering this lack of academic research focusing on sexual harassment or sexual encounters between teachers and students, matched with the incoherence between and within agencies working towards universal education along with the protection and education of the African girl child, it was not surprising that intersections and inconsistencies between these issues had fallen between the cracks. A dangerous contradiction appeared to emerge as girls were
simultaneously being pushed into schools while various reports were challenging the very idea that schools are perceived as safe and healthy environments for girls.

Furthermore, even within the small but ever growing sexual harassment in schools conversation, too often development agencies and programs have continued the “girls as victims” discourse positioning themselves as benevolent helpers needed to protect and save girls from deviant male predators. This framing of the problem has led to the further marginalization and disempowerment of girls as it limits their agency and silences their voices while simultaneously overlooking and simplifying female students both perceived and actual role in teacher-student sexual relationships. This research serves as an intervention in this line of thinking and a disruption of this discourse. It is a testament to the students I knew, the motivated educators and development staff I worked beside, and the community I served. Despite all the progress Benin has made since independence regarding women and children’s rights, there still exists a dire need for more concrete research addressing transactional teacher-student sexual encounters, awareness programming, implementation policies, reporting systems and enforcement done in collaboration with Beninois communities on a local level.
Catherine “Kate” Puzey

1984-2009

A champion for girls’ education in Benin,

an inspiration to all who knew her,

she lost her life standing up for what she believed in and knew as true and right.
Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without enormous amounts of love and support from family and friends. I thank my husband, Bamba Séne, and his family for their inspiration, insight, understanding and kindness. I wish to express the most sincere level of gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my parents Mark and Debbie Tamny, my “gammy” Yvonne Capaldi and my sisters Jakki, Montana and Johnnie for their love and encouragement over the years. I wish to acknowledge my wonderful friends, Amanda Deibert (for her friendship, encouragement, and guidance), Siphokazi Magadla (for her strength, spirit and encouragement), Jennifer McArdle (for her honest and brutal editing), Bethany Tebbe (for her reassurance and Peace Corps stories), Fanta Diamanka (for her energy, joy and constant affirmation), Matt Reinhart (for his wisdom and sincerity), Lilia Krasteva (for her solidarity and camaraderie in the otherwise empty library on Friday and Saturday nights), Jin Hong (for her thoughtfulness and motivational visits), and Salifou N’Ouanti (for his hospitality, love and friendship). I wish to also recognize the love and support of my Beninois host family and Mama Nabil who treated me as her own daughter from the moment she met me and continues to inspire me with her strength, faith, and warmth.

My sincere appreciation is further extended to my thesis committee members, Dr. Steve Howard. Dr. Diane Ciekawy, and Dr. John Hitchcock for their immense wisdom, experience, time and patience in assisting me achieve my academic goals.

Lastly and most importantly, I would like to thank all of the participants of this research for their openness, honesty and trust in me, you inspire me in ways you will never fully know. I am truly grateful to you all.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... 3  
Preface ................................................................................................................................. 4  
Dedication ........................................................................................................................... 8  
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. 9  
Chapter One ...................................................................................................................... 13  
  Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................. 13  
  Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 14  
  Introduction and Organization of the Study ................................................................. 15  
  Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 16  
    An Outline of Benin’s Political and Socio-Economic History ........................................ 17  
    Girls’ Education in Benin ......................................................................................... 19  
    Evolution of Sexual Harassment Policy in Benin ..................................................... 33  
    Sexual Harassment: Constructing a Concept ............................................................ 39  
    Defining Harassment ............................................................................................... 43  
    Sexual Harassment as a Gender-Patterned Phenomenon ........................................... 45  
    Consensual Amorous Relationships ....................................................................... 50  
    Adolescent Female Sexual Agency ......................................................................... 55  
    Abuse of Power and Cultural Theory ....................................................................... 62  
  Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 69  
Chapter Two...................................................................................................................... 75  
  Methodology Introduction ............................................................................................ 75  
  Research Methods ......................................................................................................... 79  
    Reflexivity ................................................................................................................. 86  
    Ethical Issues ............................................................................................................ 87  
    Data Analysis ........................................................................................................... 92  
    Credibility Threats ................................................................................................. 93  
    Verification .............................................................................................................. 95  
Chapter Three.................................................................................................................... 96  
  Analysis and Findings.................................................................................................... 96  
  Responsibility for Teacher-Student Sexual Relationships ........................................... 99
List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Benin.................................................................................................173
Figure 2: National Girls’ Education Campaign Billboard .............................................174
Figure 3: National Girls’ Education Campaign Taxi-Moto Shirts..............................175
Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

Based on the continued prevalence of teacher-student sexual relationships in Benin’s education system post 2006 Sexual Harassment legislation, my research aims to explore community stakeholders’ perceptions, attitudes, and responses to transactional teacher-student sexual relationships in several rural northern Beninois communities, which share access to a single secondary school in the region. This investigation will examine how individuals including parents, teachers, students and administrators understand and perceive these relationships in schools, based on participant generated responses. I hope to accurately identify factors that contribute to the development of these relationships and consequences of individuals’ acceptance (either willful or coercive) or refusal of engaging in teacher-student sexual relationships. This work will also define and describe transactional sexual relationships between teachers and students in culturally or locally specific terms that reflect the behaviors and attitudes of those involved and uncover the principle causes of the ineffective implementation strategies, absence of reporting systems and overall lack of enforcement of the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law in the region.

These goals led to an exploration of the perceived advantages of teacher-student relationships and locally generated stereotypes of the “type” of teacher who engages in “inappropriate behaviors” with his\(^2\) students. This research indirectly questions whether community members are aware of the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law and girls’ rights in

\(^2\) In the regional secondary school where this research took place all of the faculty members and educators were male, therefore only relationships between female student and male teacher were explored here.
the classroom and whether or not these laws and the framing of these relationships as “sexual harassment” have adequately addressed the behaviors occurring on the ground. Interview questions based on actual and possible consequences of teacher-student sexual relationships assess levels of awareness and current knowledge about the law, an area which has yet to be explored in current research. Another objective of this study is to gauge whether transactional teacher-student sexual relationships are viewed as irreversible phenomena or if individuals believe that there are policy or social changes which could ameliorate the classroom environment for female students. By and large, the long term goal of this research is to create awareness about the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law and gather qualitative information about the realities of teacher-student sexual relationships that would ultimately encourage greater implementation and enforcement of already existing national sexual harassment and local school policies.

**Research Questions**

**General Research Question**

How do community stakeholders perceive and conceptualize sexual interactions/relationships between teachers and students in rural northwestern Benin?

**Specific Research Questions**

1. How do sexual relationships between male teachers and female students influence girls’ educational experience?

2. What environmental or systemic factors can account for the development and acceptability or rejection of these relationships, and what are the perceived (both positive and negative) consequences of these behaviors?
3. How do local understandings and conceptualizations of transactional sexual relationships influence the enforcement (or lack thereof) of national educational policies and laws regarding sexual harassment and teacher-student relationships?

**Introduction and Organization of the Study**

Chapter One begins with a literature review, which opens with a brief outline of Benin’s political and economic history, the history of girls’ education since Benin’s 1960 independence, as well as, the evolution and development of sexual harassment law and policy in Benin. This literature review is followed by a discussion of sexual harassment as a Western constructed concept, the varying definitions of harassment and whether or not they apply to this study, an exploration of understanding sexual harassment as a gender-patterned phenomenon, an examination of consensual amorous relationships and an assessment of the current literature focused on adolescent female sexuality. These topics will be followed by a discussion on the theoretical framings of this research which include abuse of power and cultural theories and a discussion on how they relate to sexual encounters and relationships in the classroom setting. The final section will examine the major gaps and shortcomings in current academic research addressing transactional teacher-student sexual relationships and how this study aims to fill the gaps in creating a more holistic and nuanced view of the phenomenon.

Chapter Two primarily focuses on the research methodology employed for this study, including an examination of my own reflexivity as a researcher, ethical issues, data collection and analysis, credibility threats and verification methods.

Chapter Three examines the research data derived from one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions conducted during the summer of 2009 in
Northwestern Benin. This analysis section explores and interprets participant-generated data and draws on the current literature addressing sexual relations between teachers and students in sub-Saharan Africa in order to explore current understandings and framings of the phenomenon and how individuals involved assess the risks and benefits of participating in these relationships. Major findings of this study point to the role of poverty, development, unequal power relations, migration, and limited socio-economic mobility opportunities for young women in facilitating transactional teacher-student sexual relationships. It aims to explore how and why these relationships form and examines how these relationships are perceived by various community stakeholders including parents, school administrators, teachers and students.

The final chapter identifies ways forward and offers policy recommendations and strategies to address, reduce and eliminate sexual encounters between teachers and students in secondary schools across Benin. The overall goal of this research is rooted in the idea that with more explicit and careful descriptions of the complexities and variety of these sexual relationships, researchers, educators, international development agencies and the national government can more successfully address the phenomenon and its impact on girls’ education.

**Literature Review**

This literature review is organized into various themes beginning with a brief history of Benin’s political history (in order to create context for the setting of this research), an outline of girls’ education in Benin’s trajectory since the country’s 1960 independence as well as the evolution and development of the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law and policy. Next, this review will include explorations of the term “sexual
harassment” as a Western constructed concept, the varying definitions of harassment, and the recognition of harassment as a gender patterned phenomenon. This will be followed by a critical examination of concepts surrounding consensual amorous relationships and adolescent female sexuality and agency. In conclusion, this chapter will be followed by a reflection on the theoretical framings for this research including abuse of power and cultural theories and how they relate to this work’s focus on transactional sexual relationships between teachers and students. The final section of this chapter will examine the major gaps and shortcomings in current academic research and how this study will fill these gaps in creating a more holistic and nuanced view of these relationships.

An Outline of Benin’s Political and Socio-Economic History

Benin, a former French colony from 1902 until 1960 known as Dahomey, is a small francophone country located in West Africa bordered by Niger and Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the west, Nigeria to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the South. During the first decade following independence, the country suffered and endured much governmental instability due to excessive regime change, including a “litany of coups, counter coups and short lived governments,” a plight shared by many of the newly independent African states at the time (Amuwo, 2003, p. 146). This instability ended in 1972 as General Mathieu Kérékou led a successful coup to end all coups, which ultimately positioned him as the country’s official leader, almost exclusively for the following 17 years as a Marxist-Leninist military dictator and later 10 years as president.

3 See Figure 1
Kérékou’s socialist “utopia” fell under domestic and international criticism in the late 1980’s as critics emerged condemning Benin’s leadership for its endemic issues of corruption, patronage, and clientelism. In 1988, the government grappled with its legitimacy publically and underwent complete economic bankruptcy, at which time Kérékou was forced to participate in the first ever Sovereign National Conference (SNC). Ultimately, in face of these pressures and the bankrupt economy, Benin transitioned to democracy in late 1990, after seventeen years of Marxist rule. Since 1991, Benin has undergone four successful elections and three changes of power, making her the first African country to successfully transition from dictatorship to a pluralistic political system.

Since her transition to democracy in 1990, the government of Benin has privatized several major national companies and liberalized the economy, in turn encouraging foreign investment. Additionally, various development agencies have applauded Benin for the significant progress the country has made in increasing formal education enrollment and healthcare initiatives. Decentralization has been a crucial part of Benin’s recent economic development, as this process has been carefully observed by other democracies, money lending organizations, NGOs, and private investors. The country’s recent neo-liberal economic initiatives and investment in the social sector have led to the International Monetary Fund’s 2005 decision to grant Benin 100% debt relief. Additionally, in February 2006, the country received approval for a US$307 million dollar grant from the Millennium Challenge Corporation that aims “to improve the investment climate of the country and diversify the private sector” (African Development Bank, 2007). However, despite these minimal levels of economic growth and investment;
poverty, unemployment, inflation, and corruption continue to have a toll on life in Benin and have not drastically re-oriented the country’s externally dependent economy.

Today, with a population nearing nine million, Benin is a resource poor country which remains underdeveloped and overly dependent on subsistence agriculture, cotton exports and regional trade. The majority of Benin’s population is concentrated in the southern regions of the country in major cities and areas surrounding the political and economic capitals, Porto-Novo and Cotonou, respectively. With a 2006 per capital income of US$510, according to the 2007 Human Development Report, Benin remains one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 163 out of the 177 countries listed. Nearly 40% of Benin’s GDP is derived from cotton production, and although Benin was recently ranked as one of the largest cotton producers in Africa, over half of the country’s population remains overly dependent on subsistence farming, while many of the poor have not benefited from the cotton sector (Mongbo, 2008). Benin’s agricultural potentials particularly with cotton and palm oil “have not been fully exploited to meet the needs of a human-centered and people-driven development” (Ngwane, 2006). Job creation, rural development, economic diversification and investment in agriculture are key development issues in Benin due to their potential for improving the lives of the nation’s citizens.

**Girls’ Education in Benin**

Since independence, many countries in sub-Saharan West Africa have focused on strengthening their respective educational systems by building more schools, enhancing school resources, training teachers, and increasing student enrollment (Moulton, Mundy, Weldmon, & Williams, 2001). In recent years, the education of the girl child has become
of particular interest to researchers, the international development community, and national literacy programs for nationwide progress and development (Floro & Wolf, 1990). The 2002 United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasize the importance of both gender equality and girls’ education, while urging various leaders of the developing world to make these issues a priority at the national level (UNDP, 2003). The third MDG aims to, “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015” (UNDP, 2003). This particular goal has been a major stepping stone for addressing the issue of girls’ education throughout Africa.

In Benin, where one out of three girls does not attend school and the literacy rate for women between the ages of 15 to 24 is only 33.2%, there are a variety of obstacles girls face in gaining access to a safe and affordable education (United Nations, 2007). It is in this area that gender inequality has emerged as a major concern, as the variety of obstacles young girls face are as wide in scope as they are deep in complexity. Several political, economic, and social barriers, which directly violate the girl child’s right to access education, include the price of school fees, poverty and societal norms; there has been remarkable progress in the past decade addressing these issues which is evident in the increased girls’ enrollment rates across the continent and in Benin specifically (Wynd, 1999).

Although the government of Benin has actively identified and addressed many of these external barriers through various campaigns and initiatives, some of the most pervasive challenges to girls' ability to access education take place at the home and is a direct result of poverty. Reports by scholars and development practitioners insinuate that
the reasons behind the continued gender gap within Benin’s education system vary from blaming the girls and their families to faulting internal and external barriers within the school system (Beoku-Betts et al., 1998; Byrne, 1990; Njeuma, 1993). Even with subsidized and/or free education, the indirect costs involved in schooling, such as school fees, uniforms, textbooks, writing materials and school supplies (pens, rulers, notebooks, photocopies, etc.) create a dilemma by which economically disadvantaged families are forced to engage in an informal cost-benefit analysis regarding which child’s education to support and finance, often leading to a preference for investing in boys (Beoku-Betts et al., 1998). More often than not, when funds are limited and a choice must be made, parents prioritize their sons’ schooling at the expense of their daughters’ education (Wynd, 1999). This normalized situation results in an educational sacrifice on the part of girls as they dropout of school at the secondary level where school fees tend to be more expensive and knowledge levels are perceived as sufficient\textsuperscript{4} for women.

The practice of educating boys over girls is often viewed as a vestige of the colonial education system which systematically excluded women and girls from both academic and political life. In the 1960’s after Benin and other countries across West Africa gained their independence, many of the European colonial ways of thinking and doing persisted across the political, social and economic landscape and were carried out by privileged African males who had been educated in European school systems (Assie-Lumumba, 1997). Thus, a transfer of power did not translate into a change of policy in schools, as the education system in Benin and elsewhere remained deeply embedded and

\textsuperscript{4}This knowledge sufficiency claim is rooted in local expectations of girls and women, which include more traditional conceptualizations of women’s primary role in the reproductive sphere as caretakers, mothers and wives.
influenced by the ex-colonial state, including the persistence of European pedagogical practices and learning materials. Even now, formal school settings (particularly in rural areas) which have not involved traditional and community actors continue to be viewed as a form of foreign import and are mistrusted because of their lack of community, religious and traditional consultation and participation (Howard, 2001). In his research, Byrne (1990) has outlined historical trends behind the resistance to girls’ education concluding that there are both structural and systematic barriers to girls’ education, in many cultures and that the cause of girls’ lack of participation in schooling and educational attainment is not specific to girls but to the surrounding systems and cultures in which they exist. Divisions of labor propelled by colonial cash crop systems, structural adjustment programs and local and national policies have limited girls’ participation in formal education, as economic crises continue to cause a disproportionate increase in the women and children who are solicited to participate in increased household work in order for the family to survive. Recent awareness campaigns by Benin’s government along with international and national donor organizations have begun to actively address these types of societal norms along with economic factors which prohibit access to an affordable education for young women and girls.

The issue of time and domestic chores and tasks has been frequently cited as inhibitory for girls’ education across the continent (Ballara, 1991; Gaudelli, 2001). After they leave school, girls often aid in household tasks and activities and are overwhelmed by the abundance of work inside and outside of school. Girl students become fatigued by chores and can become discouraged when not able to complete homework or find sufficient time to study. Furthermore, many school policies attach additional domestic
tasks to female students’ workloads as girls are expected to sweep classrooms and clean up school property before and after class and bring basins of water to last throughout the day (Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998). These additional workloads greatly affect and influence girl children’s educational experiences.

Other barriers to female education include the various school pregnancy policies across the continent that claim to penalize both pregnant girl students and the school boys (or teachers) who impregnate them. However, in practice these policies are more often used to dismiss pregnant girls while excusing boys due to a lack of evidence or paternal denial. One USAID study cited by Teitjen (1991) found that among girl drop-outs, 56 percent of female students abandoned school as a result of pregnancy whereby only 3 percent of boys were expelled for their involvement in impregnating a girl student. This seemingly gender-neutral policy has become gender discriminatory in practice.

An additional obstacle in female educative achievement is the possibility that many girls face dilemmas and contradictions between their understandings of femininity and their educational aspirations and ambitions because of the lack of formally educated female role models in rural areas. It is difficult for girls and their parents to envision an acceptable balance between meeting societal expectations of women while simultaneously keeping up with the demands of schooling (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999). Additionally, access to education has been dominated by men for so long that there becomes an inherent feeling of trespass for many girls when entering the classroom. In a study in Ethiopia, Rose and Tembon (1991) use evidence from interviews with girls, their parents and teachers to demonstrate, “that despite government policies, economic inequalities and the continuing cultural importance of early marriage remain the most
important issues in girls' educational participation” (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999, p. 11). Likewise, Miles’ (1994) research on educational practices and gender norms in Niger revealed damaging widespread perceptions of girls’ education which demonstrated the commonly held belief that an adolescent girl’s desirable and natural place is at home, married and with children. In an interview with a rural Nigerien teacher about gender differences in the classroom the teacher explained that, “The girls are especially bad. They make mistakes on purpose because their mothers tell them that if they don’t study, they’ll be thrown out of school, and if they’re out of school they can be married. And that’s all they want anyway” (Miles, 1994, pp.235-236). This response encapsulates the pervasive idea that a girl’s presence in school is not natural and that her true place and only alternative is to be a wife and mother. In her study on Muslim Fulani girls’ schooling experience, Balde (2004) found that, under social pressures to prepare for wife and motherhood roles, African girls are often pushed to focus more on community expectations of them than on their formal education. Additionally, it is often the case that once a girl becomes pregnant or is married, “it is very unusual for her to continue with schooling, they are [then] considered as adults and cannot participate in “childish” school activities” (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999, p. 93). The result of these practices and policies leave girls with little other choice than to persevere against all odds or eventually give up and abandon school in order to become young brides and mothers.

In spite of Benin’s unfortunate reputation of maintaining one of the widest gender gaps in the world, the country has made great strides throughout the past decade in increasing girls’ enrollment at the primary level and sustaining it beyond to the secondary level (UNDP, 2007). Benin’s Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has allocated
an increasing amount of attention and resources to gender issues in education, making girls’ education a national priority (Akpo, 2008). Recently in Benin, there have been numerous advocacy campaigns, teacher training programs and grassroots initiatives that address the need for girls to attend school (Akpo, 2008). “Toutes les filles à l’école” (All the Girls at School), is an ongoing collaborative government campaign, sponsored by various NGOs and international organizations, which aims to target some of the root causes of Benin’s gender gap in education. This nationwide campaign has been successful in creating a visible space for girls’ education in the country and has put girls’ access to schooling at the forefront of public dialogue. The government has been involved in planning, funding and executing various communication development strategies including an extensive poster campaign, large roadside billboards\(^5\), radio and television programs and a unique screen printing advertisement on the back of moto-taxi drivers’\(^6\) official uniforms.\(^7\)

Despite all of this progress, these programs have only addressed a fraction of the problem, as there has yet to be any significant amount of attention given to the challenges that emerge once girls enter the classroom (Wible, 2005). Until recently, Biraimah’s (1982) study of secondary school girls in Togo was one of the few studies focusing on African girl students’ classroom environment and schooling experience. Observations from her study demonstrated that Togolese male teachers had little to no regard for the capacity, ability, spirit or potential of their female students and that this mentality was reinforced through subconscious teaching practices and differential treatment between the

\(^5\) See Figure 2

\(^6\) Taxi-motorcycles are most popular mode of public transportation in Benin.

\(^7\) See Figure 3
sexes (Biraimah, 1982). Girls in the classroom ended up either being ignored altogether or ridiculed in the classroom by their teachers and classmates. These subliminal messages have made girls reluctant to participate in the classroom setting and have overtime contributed to a devaluation of girls’ own assessments of their individual abilities and strengths (Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998).

As Benin begins to approach a more equitable balance in female/male enrollment at the primary school level in response to the UN’s MDGs and various other international pressures, a closer examination of emerging issues of gender disparity in secondary school enrollment has brought about the unfortunate realization that schools are often perceived as not only discriminatory towards girls but also as potentially unsafe. This realization has led researchers to pay more attention to the numerous obstacles and safety issues which restrict or limit female achievement, enrollment, and overall wellbeing inside the classroom (Akpo, 2008). During the 2002 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, UNESCO’s director for basic education, Aïcha Dah Diallo, pinpointed one disturbing aspect of this unfortunate reality emphasizing that, “girls worldwide face an ‘unsafe environment’ at school, one that often includes sexual harassment” (Wible, 2005, p. 515). Due to this startling discovery, the international and non-governmental organization (NGO) community has begun to pressure governments into taking legislative action that enables a move towards safer classrooms (Victory Way, 2008). In response to these increasing international concerns regarding sexual harassment, the World Bank, declared a new policy in 2002 to include sexual harassment awareness initiatives in education projects in order to guarantee the girl child’s access to a safe education environment (UNESCO, 2002).
In 2002, the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) Benin chapter organized a series of workshops to gauge the prevalence of gender-based violence in classrooms across Benin. The results of these sessions found that,

There was a high incidence of sexual relations between teachers and students and, as in “cross-generational” or “sugar daddy” relationships more generally…a strong transactional element: the frequent exchange of money or grades for sex, as well as the threat of bad grades to coerce girls into sexual relationships (Wible, 2004, p.6).

Based on these findings in conjunction with his own research on the issue, Wible (2005), a fellow returned Peace Corps Benin education volunteer stated that,

Sexual harassment in schools appears to be a growing problem across the [African] continent that undermines girls’ education... Sexual harassment at school and sexual relationships between teachers and students are more common in Benin, West Africa, than most schools care to admit, and affect academic achievement of girls at a vulnerable age when each additional year of schooling creates invaluable individual and social benefits (Wible, 2004, p.7).

In the Beninese context, these reports were crucial stepping stones in identifying teacher-student sexual relationships as one of the major obstacles to the struggles made for girls’ education. The lack of greater academic research which pinpoints the realities and prevalence of these often transactional relationships becomes problematic as, due to the clandestine nature of the acts, behaviors and relationships taking place, many have misjudged or denied the scope and depth of the problem.

It is important to note however, that teacher-student sexual relationships in schools are not exclusively a Beninois or African problem as in the Western context

---

8 In a UK based study, Walkerdine (1981) discovered that "boys as young as 4 had learned to use verbal sexual harassment to challenge the authority of women teachers and humiliate and degrade girls" and other studies demonstrated that even schools with what appeared to be pro-feminist good policies on paper were dominated by male teachers perceptions which claimed that girls "enjoyed" being sexually harassed (Harne, 2000, pgs. 92-93).
there has been considerable research highlighting the extent and nature of sexual harassment of girls and women teachers in co-education settings since the late 1970s. Yet, the contemporary focus on sexual relationships between educators and students on the African continent has emerged as a major issue because of the plethora of serious dangers and risks these sexual encounters facilitate in this previously unexplored setting (Bourque & Convey, 1993; Embet, 1998; UNESCO, 2003). Sexual interactions between teachers and their students contribute to a lack of participation and underachievement in school including increased timidity and apprehension in the classroom, abandonment of school, and a variety of physical and mental health issues (Akpo, 2008). They are a significant contributor to the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, early or unplanned pregnancy, low self-esteem, self-consciousness in social interactions, trauma and depression (Akpo, 2008).

Executive director of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, Penina Mlama, reports that, “girls’ academic performance was ‘affected drastically’” by harassment at schools, “especially when the girl refuses to have a relationship with the teacher, [and] the tendency is for the teacher to harass the child academically” (Quist-Arcton, 2003). Unfortunately, it seems to have become commonplace to find girls who have been “marked down by their tormentors, simply because they refused their advances” (Quist-Arcton, 2003). In a news briefing in 2003, Jacob Bregman, the then lead education specialist at the World Bank, cited an example of this phenomenon in the form of a story. He tells of “a hard working girl whose marks were inexplicably and persistently low” and goes on to explain how her grades had not been a reflection of her academic work but that, “she had refused sexual advances from her teacher, so he failed her” (Quist-Arcton,
In closing this anecdote, Bregman (2003) emphasized the fact that “girls are exposed to more risks than boys and, as they go into puberty, they are exposed to even more risks,” thus, calling to attention the vulnerability of girls in unprotected classrooms (Quist-Arcton, 2003).

Sexual encounters between teachers and students have been cited as a major contributor to the high dropout rate of female students, which is evident in UNESCO’s 2006 statistics that show for every 100 girls who enter primary school in Benin, less than 39% in urban areas and 14% in rural areas are able to successfully transition to secondary school (UNESCO, 2006). Part of the reason behind female students’ low retention rate between the primary and secondary level is grounded in the belief that adolescent girls are at risk for increased levels of unwanted sexual attention. Various studies have shown that there appears to be a link between physical maturity and/or early onset of puberty and incidents of sexual harassment, whereby, “adolescents who had matured early were found to be at an increased risk for sexual harassment” (Chesire, 2004; Emebet, 1998; Ormerod, Collinsworth, & Perry, 2008, p. 115). These findings are significant in that they justify parental concerns that schools are potentially unsafe environments for maturing girls.

In a study on rural Ethiopian girl students, Embet (1998) recognizes sexual interactions between teachers and students and unfriendly school environments as major impediments to girl students’ enrollment and achievement. Forms of political and economic instability, school closures or popular strikes only exacerbate safety risks for African female students and deter parents from permitting their daughters to attend schools in distant regional capitals where there are enhanced educational and
employment opportunities (Boeku-Betts et al., 1988). Furthermore, based on research in rural Guinea where 64% of parents stated that they feared school-related pregnancy and prefer that their daughters be taught by females, Baldé (2004) claims that teacher-student sexual encounters are most likely a “determinant factor that explains parents’ fear for their daughters’ safety and….might be greatly contributing to the removal of girls from school after they reach puberty” (p. 72). Baldé’s (2004) findings are particularly significant considering that the overwhelming majority of secondary school teachers throughout Benin are male, and in the region where this paper’s research was conducted, of the four secondary schools within a 45 mile radius of the primary research site, not a single institution staffed a female teacher or administrator. Evidently, teacher-student sexual relationships create a loss of respect on all levels: students for teachers, teachers for administration, and parents for girls’ education (Victory Way, 2008). The perception that schools are unsafe has contributed to the reluctance of parents to send their girl children to school and has been constantly reinforced by community level incidents of pre-marital or unplanned pregnancy, HIV/AIDS infection, and rape (Tietjen, 1991).

Girl students themselves are aware of the dangers and obstacles young women face in the educative domain. When asked to “identify problems they face at school,” secondary school girls who participated in WiLDAF Benin’s workshops and seminars, stated time and time again that, “teachers should focus on their work as teachers rather than pursue their students for sex,” adding that, “school authorities should notgrope or ‘bother’ students in their offices” (Wible, 2005, p. 525). These candid responses drew warning flags to an uncharted area which had merely been glossed over by previous academic research on girls’ education; that sexual harassment was a rampant and
pervasive problem. On this note, a common, critical issue confronted by those raising awareness about the dangers of sexual harassment or sexual relationships between teachers and students in the school setting is that individuals typically perceive incidents of these behaviors as abnormal or exceptional cases and not as systemic indicators of a widespread problem.

Traditionally, both experts and laypersons have accounted for the sexual abuse of minors by invoking the image of “the dirty old man” or by reference to various types of mental illness. However, as has been noted more recently by feminists, given the widespread nature of childhood sexual abuse, it is unreasonable to assume that most child abusers are particularly unusual human beings suffering from one or another diseased state. An alternative explanation is that deeply entrenched psychological, social and cultural practices must contribute significantly to the likelihood that many males, from a wide range of cultural backgrounds will be prone to abuse children sexually (Harne, 2000, p. 42)

When addressing the consequences of sexual encounters between teachers and students, Human Rights Watch (2001) states that, “because it often remains unchallenged, much of the behavior that is violent, harassing, degrading, and sexual in nature has become so normalized in many schools that it should be seen as a systemic problem for education, not merely a series of individual incidents” (p.2). For this very reason, more qualitative and quantitative research is necessary to link together individual incidents in order to tell a larger story. Additional findings of WiDLAF Benin and Wible’s (2005) research on girls’ education in Benin showed that an overwhelming majority of students in their studies reported having witnessed or experienced harassment at school. In fact, 80 percent of girls interviewed testified that, “They knew girls who had been approached by teachers for sex, and many believed that teachers give good grades to girls who accept their advances and threaten to punish those who refuse with poor grades, underscoring the coercive and transactional nature of much teacher-student harassment” (Wible, 2005,
Based on these troubling findings, Wible suggests that, “harassment in schools has nearly become an institutionalized phenomenon,” confirming the idea that transactional sexual encounters between teachers and students are much more widespread than a few isolated occurrences (Wible 2005, p. 523). Additionally, harassment in these studies was categorized in two different and distinct ways, both as “harassment by seduction”, where gifts or points were exchanged for sexual attention and “harassment by pressure” with coercion or humiliation obligating girls to accept unwanted advances (Wible, 2005, p. 523). The transactional and consensual element of the former categorization begins to suggest that girls are often more than passive victims of harassment but active participants in a larger and more complex phenomenon.

Wible’s (2005) findings coincide with another more recent student by Victory Way (2008), an active NGO based in Northern Benin which specializes in sexual harassment in the classroom, who affirms that it has become, “impossible to work within Benin’s education system without direct confrontation of the issue of inappropriate teacher-student relationships” (Victory Way, 2008). Victory Way posits that the phenomenon of students sleeping with teachers in exchange for grades and the practice of giving lower notes than deserved as a punishment for girls who refuse teachers’ advances has emerged as an issue in regions across Benin and both in rural and urban settings (Victory Way, 2008). The normalization of these relationships and behaviors makes seriously addressing these issues in schools and communities a major challenge. Because of its suspected prevalence level and the amount of damage it can cause, teacher-student sexual relationships and sexual harassment must be viewed as more than
isolated exceptions to the norm but as a deep-seated problem in Benin’s educational system.

_Evolution of Sexual Harassment Policy in Benin_

Despite widespread knowledge that teacher-student sexual encounters are both risky and dangerous for the physical and psychological development of young girls, an alarming and pervasive conceptualization of the phenomenon dominated much of the discourse surrounding sexual harassment in Benin. Based on the 1988 Ministry of Education Policy, which highlighted girls’ extravagant hairstyles and perfumes as causal contributors to incidents of sexual harassment, many individuals upheld a “blame the victim” mentality which placed the responsibility of eradicating sexual harassment on school girls themselves. This perception was demonstrated by many of Wible (2005) and WiLDAF Benin’s (2002) research participants who indicated that it is often the girl students who harass and seduce their teachers. The proponents of this argument however gave little to no mention of the teacher’s responsibility of resisting these advances, a disturbing omission.

This lack of commitment to understanding and addressing these sexual transactions and relationships is demonstrated by the infrequency of actual enforcement and repercussions for teachers who violate school policies which prohibit teacher-student fraternization. A reality which is evident in the scarce number of official sexual harassment reprimands, arrests, or reports throughout the country (WiLDAF Benin cited in Wible, 2005). Additionally, although incidents of transactional sexual relationships between teachers and students and sexual harassment are not new phenomena and their various harmful consequences are well known, many continue to fail to see how they
drastically undermine Benin’s development and progress. Léa Gaba Afouda, a gender and community participation specialist for the National Institute for Training and Research in Education in Benin, reinforces this idea stating that, “sexual harassment in schools is a very pressing issue…that undermines the efforts that have been deployed for girls’ education” (Wible, 2005). Because development is directly related to the capacity of a people, without safe and affordable education for young women, half of Benin’s work force and potential progress are being excluded, to the detriment of the country as a whole (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999).

Despite these challenges, the debate surrounding sexual harassment in schools continued to advance and gain public attention. In 2002, a regional forum on education was held by Education International, an international organization of education professionals, in Cotonou, Benin, in order to address the issue of unsafe learning environments for girls (Wible, 2005). After this conference and the previously discussed WiLDAF Benin workshops, the National Network for the Promotion of Girls’ Education released a documentary which spotlighted gender-based violence in Beninois schools including an emphasis on teacher to student sexual harassment. This multi-faceted approach proved effective and as a direct result of the new momentum surrounding sexual harassment, several Beninois NGOs initiated awareness raising campaigns in various secondary schools along with an “intense lobbying” campaign directed at the Ministry of Education. These initiatives eventually led to the 2003 signing of a new policy on sexual harassment in schools, which focused specifically on “teachers who use their authority to pressure girls into sexual relationships or simply barter grades for sex” (Wible, 2005).
Unfortunately, despite the seemingly progressive 2003 Sexual Harassment Policy, the government’s response to sexual harassment initially remained limited as WiLDAF Benin reported that, “the worse an offending teacher ha[d] to fear [was] being transferred to a neighboring school” (Wible, 2005, p. 525). Nevertheless, due to the inadequacies and lack of real change brought about by the 2003 legislation, those working for women and children’s rights continued to pressure the government of Benin for a more explicit law with hard-line repercussions for educators who overstepped their boundaries as professionals.

Finally, on July 17, 2006, the government of Benin successfully passed progressive, unprecedented legislation regarding sexual relationships between teachers and students and sexual harassment in the classroom (Amusa & Mowad, 2006). Sixty-four out of sixty-five assembly members voted in favor of this much awaited legislation, which was introduced by Lamatou Alaza, one of the three women serving on the National Assembly at the time (Amusa & Mowad, 2006). The 2006 Sexual Harassment Law became the first law in Benin to prescribe sanctions to deter sexual harassment incidents in the school system which include the stipulation that persons convicted of sexual harassment face potential sentences of one to two years in prison and fines ranging from US$200 to US$2,000 (Beninois Law, 2006). The law additionally penalizes persons who are aware of sexual harassment offenses and do not report them. However, while the law is an important milestone in and of itself, limited awareness and understanding of the law has led to little or no enforcement throughout the country (Akpo, 2008). In the most recent report on sexual harassment, Akpo (2008) emphasizes that, “gender based violence is culturally accepted [in Benin] because of ignorance of the laws that protect girls’ and
women’s rights and the denial of those rights” (Akpo, 2008, p. 147). Victory Way (2008) concurred with this statement in their recently released official reports, based on their 2007 Sexual Harassment Survey that demonstrated that awareness and understanding about the new law has been limited by the fact that both girls and their parents are unaware of their rights and the existence of the law (Victory Way, 2008). Victory Way (2008) claims that even school administrations, faculty, and teachers remain unclear about what constitutes sexual harassment and how to address the issue in their own schools and regions.

In response to the lack of general awareness amongst the population, Victory Way has emerged as a leader in raising awareness about the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law and defining sexual harassment as a concept for students, parents and teachers, while also generating country specific statistics on the prevalence of teacher-student sexual relationships within Benin. In their 2007-2008 pilot nationwide sexual harassment survey, approximately 500 male and female students, teachers, and administrators in twenty-five secondary schools throughout Benin completed questionnaires regarding incidents of sexual encounters between teachers and students in their schools.9 The results were then released to the government of Benin in order to create awareness and gain national attention on the issue (Victory Way, 2008). The staggering survey results found that 65% of students who participated in the research claimed that they knew of teachers who made sexual advances to their students, 59% knew of teachers who gave grades in exchange for sexual favors, 65% knew at least one student who had been

---

9 Questionnaires were distributed to schools through the use of Peace Corps education volunteers throughout the country, providing a wide sample of Northern and Southern and rural and urban environments.
impregnated by her professor, and 62% claimed to have witnessed teachers threatening students who had refused their advances (Victory Way, 2008). Perhaps the most disturbing finding was that 40% of students claimed to know of situations in which teachers made unwilling or problematic students “disappear”\(^{10}\) (Victory Way, 2008). Survey results compiled by teacher participant responses found that 68% of teachers interviewed knew of fellow teachers who made sexual advances to their students, 50% claimed to be aware of colleagues who had sexual relations with their students, 70% knew of students who had been impregnated by their teachers, and 32% knew of teachers that gave grades in exchange for sexual favors (Victory Way, 2008). Based on the results of this preliminary data, teacher-student sexual interactions in schools were occurring in both the North and South of the country and in both urban and rural areas. Even after this disturbing report, the transactional exchange of grades for sex remains an underrepresented topic across academic research on girls’ education and sexual harassment theory, despite the fact that it is the basis for many teacher-student relationships and sexual encounters.

These unsettling statistics demonstrated a significant need for sexual harassment awareness, intervention, and enforcement and have inspired Victory Way to continue its efforts on this front by continuing to expand their work in additional schools and communities. Victory Way’s 2007-2008 Sexual Harassment Study was published in May of 2008 despite major delays resulting from difficulties in locating a publisher willing to print such a sensitive report. The report’s findings raised an enormous amount of

\(^{10}\) Due to the limitations of the questionnaire format it is difficult to know exactly what this response refers to but it is likely meant to insinuate that these girls are chased out of school and relocated to rural areas.
controversy among educators themselves but have yet to be officially addressed by the government of Benin (Victory Way, 2008). “A paradoxical situation has emerged as the taboo nature of sexual violence perpetrated by teachers and administrators against students, is so controversial that even dialogue about ending this very violence is in itself labeled taboo by proxy, and left unaddressed” (interview with Victory Way representative, Erin Morgan via email, January, 2009).

Despite an increase of girls’ enrollment in schools and the adoption of the progressive 2006 Sexual Harassment Law in the classroom, sexual harassment continues to intimidate and negatively affect girls and girls’ education throughout Benin. Although the phenomenon of teachers engaging in sexual relationships with students has been deemed by researchers, civil society groups and nongovernmental organizations as endemic to the schools of Benin, little research to date has fully explored the dynamics of these relationships from a holistic perspective: one which engages the voices of all actors and stakeholders. The various NGOs, researchers, government officials, and intellectuals addressing sexual interactions in Benin’s schools have all acknowledged a need for increased awareness, reporting, implementation and enforcement of the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law and stress the need for more concrete research and literature about the topic. Furthermore, Mlama (2003) stresses that these sort of inappropriate teacher-student interactions in schools are a difficult issue to address because,

The evidence is not out in public and because these things are done in private… Statistics on sexual abuse against schoolgirls by male teachers [is] scarce, because so little evidence was documented. It becomes difficult to find out to what extent this is happening in the schools. And of course if you ask the school management, they will always deny it, saying that it is not happening” (Quist-Arcton, 2003).
Echoing this concern, Wible (2005) emphasizes that, “although a growing body of country-specific statistical evidence documents that many schoolgirls across the continent suffer harassment in schools, few field projects have addressed the issue” (Wible, 2005). The evidence available is extremely quantitative with little to no qualitative data or analysis, demonstrating an immediate need for more exploratory qualitative research. Overall, there is an overwhelming demand for more qualitative research which not only indicates the prevalence and pervasiveness of the phenomenon but that documents actual, personal experiences and understandings of how and why teacher-student sexual relationships emerge and how those involved assess the risks and benefits of these interactions.

Sexual Harassment: Constructing a Concept

The term “sexual harassment” has been the medium through which student-teacher sexual relationships have been described and framed in the vast majority of academic research, development policy and national law to date. The limitations of this term in encapsulating the wide range of behaviors and interactions taking place on the ground will be examined elsewhere in this paper. However, the goal here is to understand and highlight how “sexual harassment” became the umbrella term for addressing and describing these interactions and why it has been so readily appropriated across the globe.

Although the conceptualization of sexual harassment as a social wrong and legally condemnable behavior is a cultural phenomenon rooted in Western feminist movements and United States law, the concept has been appropriated by other geographic regions and cultures because of the similar ways in which these behaviors have manifested throughout the world. The variety of ways in which sexual harassment is
understood and denounced in different settings is dependent upon diverse cultural understandings of gender, sexuality and power. Western feminists coined the term sexual harassment and conceptualize it as an “expression of power and a form of sex discrimination (MacKinnon, 1979) rooted in male dominance and privilege in the capitalist workplace, perpetuated through sex-role socialization and the sexual objectification of women (MacCaghy, 1985) and obscured by patriarchal myths (Evans, 1978)” (Bingham, 1994, p. 3). As the second wave feminist movement emerged in the United States and Western Europe in 1960s and 1970s, it became evident that male sexual violence needed to be recognized and addressed in a plethora of formal and informal institutions from government offices to business conference rooms, assembly lines, construction sites, and even classrooms in secondary schools and universities. For the level of analysis here it is critical to note that sexual harassment in the school setting is centered both on the power a teacher has over his students and the power males have over females in various cultural settings.

In the United States the sexual harassment dialogue has heavily referenced market and industrial logic which bases its argument on the importance of professionalism, productivity and equal or minority rights (Saguy, 1999). In contrast, Benin’s dialogue surrounding sexual harassment is more steeply grounded in France’s political conceptualizations of individual rights, abuse of power and violence (Saguy, 1999). Despite the variations of interpretation, these two major conceptualizations of the phenomenon similarly frame sexual harassment as a social and legal wrong which subverts previous perceptions of gender and sexuality, which seems to have simultaneously privileged men and situated women as sexual objects. Essentially, the
very existence of the term challenges previous assumptions that men have sexual access
to any and all women who do not explicitly reject their advances.

It is significant to note that, in 1980 the United States became the first country to
establish laws against sexual harassment with the guidelines adopted in 1980 by the US
Equal Employment Opportunity Committee's (EEOC) which defined sexual harassment
as,

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or
physical conduct of a sexual nature...when (1) Submission to such conduct is
made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's
employment (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is
used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual (3) such
conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's
work performance or creating and intimidating, hostile or offensive working
environment (EEOC, 1980).

This definition has been extended to include all public and formal institutions. Moreover,
sexual harassment distinguishes itself from other forms of harassment and discrimination
in that all three sections of the definition characterize and condemn acts which are
unwanted by the recipient based on the sexual nature of the acts being performed. These
acts include a wide range of activities from verbal harassment to physical abuse such as
suggestive comments, touching, groping, physical assault or rape and this broad
understanding of harassment has been the cornerstone of various other countries’ laws
and policies regarding sexual harassment.

The first part of the EEOC’s definition is what is legally referred to as quid pro
quo harassment but is more colloquially referred to as “power-player” or “abuse of power”
harassment (Wall, 2000). Typically in this category, harassers use their positions of
power in hierarchies to negotiate sexual favors in exchange for benefits such as, in the
case of schools, giving good grades or recommendations, while withholding other opportunities or benefits as a means of coercing sexual favors (Wall, 2000). This could also include elements of punishment for refusal such as the allocation of additional work or punishments, such as giving hours after school or even giving lower grades than work merits to persuade students to engage in sexual activities. The second portion of this definition focuses on whether or not the harassing behavior interferes with an individual’s job or school performance. Therefore, this element deals less explicitly with direct power relationships and is focused on a “hostile” environment between the harasser and harassed, whereby the harasser makes everyday interactions in the work or school setting unpleasant, intimidating or uncomfortable for the victim (Wall, 2000).

The difference between the US and French/Beninois law is that in Benin the law only addresses the former part of the EEOC’s definition, making no reference to hostile environment in their conceptualization of sexual harassment. In this framework, the act of harassing another is narrowed and defined only as the use of orders, threats or constraint with the overall goal of obtaining sexual favors through an individual abusing a superior position of power or authority (employers, bosses, educators) (Saguy, 1999). In this scenario only an individual in a subordinate position can be harassed by a superior, someone with direct authority over them. Based on this definition, only what American jurisprudence calls *quid pro quo* sexual harassment or situations of sexual coercion are covered under the law. This difference in policy is based on inherently different perceptions of individual rights, justice and power (Saguy, 1999). Understanding this perspective is crucial as the law in Benin is deeply rooted in French law, philosophy and theory. Essentially the major difference is that in the United States sexual harassment law
focuses on the victim’s perception of the behavior as “unwelcome” or distressing, whereas French and Beninois law define sexual harassment from the perspective of the perpetrator, who acts or coerces to receive “sexual favors” for his/her ultimate benefit (Saguy, 1999). The United States’ perception is grounded in protecting the victim and punishing the perpetrator based on the effects of his/her action whereas French law is grounded in the injustices caused by misuses or abuses of power and authority.

Harne (2000) refines the previous EEOC sexual harassment definition by explicitly referencing the phenomenon’s presence in schools emphasizing that sexual harassment is,

Sexually violent behaviour which takes place in public and institutional contexts and is undertaken mainly by boys and men. In school settings it can be defined as a range or continuum of behaviors that are designed to objectify, humiliate, intimidate and control girls and women. These range from verbal jokes or comments about their bodies, sexuality, or sexual reputations, to staring, leering or showing pornography, to actual physical touching and behaviour which amounts to sexual assault (p. 92).

Here we see the array of forms in which sexual harassment may manifest itself in the school setting. However, both the United States’ EEOC definition and Harne’s more nuanced definition fail to adequately address the oftentimes transactional yet hierarchical power dynamics at play when examining pressurized sex between teachers and adolescent girls.

Defining Harassment

Sexual harassment, or unwelcome sexual attention and/or contact has been described, defined and named in a variety of ways across the globe which has created confusion and misunderstandings about its pervasive nature and damaging effects. Oftentimes sexual harassment distinguishes itself from other forms of harassment due to
the sexual nature of the behaviors taking place and is typically defined as a continuum of abusive/unwanted sexual behavior which ranges in severity from very mild to extreme forms of sexual violence. The wide range of behaviors within and between these categories makes the term sexual harassment a slippery and problematic concept to nail down in interview questions and questionnaires, especially when interacting with adolescents who tend to associate sexual harassment only with the most severe forms of abuse (Houston & Hwang, 1996; Roscoe et al., 1994). Unwanted sexual comments, propositions for sex or physical contact such as groping are less frequently associated with the term sexual harassment and therefore, explicit reference to these behaviors is necessary in constructing valid information regarding the prevalence of sexual harassment in secondary institutions. Because schools are locations where sexual and other identities are developed, sexuality plays a major role in adolescents’ experience of schooling on a variety of levels, through sexualized teasing, games, jokes, dating, and other interactions all of which share the common denominator of power relations (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Without a detailed list of sexually harassing behaviors, sexual harassment becomes a difficult concept to gauge as there exist a myriad of contesting understandings and conceptualizations of the phenomenon.

Despite the fact that these definitions and categorizations are grounded in Western understandings of sexual harassment, similar diagnostic tools can and should be created to articulate similar behaviors in varying cultural settings. Considering that each incident in this wide array of behaviors can be labeled simply as sexual harassment, identifying more nuanced definitions and examples of sexually harassing or inappropriate behavior is an essential component of generating awareness, creating boundaries, and protecting
women and young girls. This sentiment is eloquently stated by Westkott (1983) who states, “By clarifying that which we oppose, we set the groundwork for creating a vision of that for which we long” (p. 212). In other words we have to be able to identify and label a problem in order to create concrete understanding, gather consensus and combat it.

Since sexual harassment as a term has become integrated into the international social discourse, women’s groups, female lawyers and politicians have deployed a multifaceted approach which focuses on tackling the phenomenon on several fronts. These include the development of school policies which officially condemn sexual harassment, women and girl awareness and empowerment campaigns, curriculum modifications and a critical analysis which examines the ways in which schools as institutions have become sites which reinforce sexist, racist and classist power dynamics (Harne, 2000; Mohanty, 2003).

Sexual Harassment as a Gender-Patterned Phenomenon

Sexual harassment is often perceived as a gender-patterned phenomenon whereby girls and young women reportedly experience harassment more frequently and to a more intrusive degree than their male counterparts (Ormerod, Collinsworth, & Perry, 2008). Because sexual harassment has been identified as “a discursive practice that degrades women and controls them in numerous ways, ‘physically, emotionally, economically, politically and culturally’ it must not be viewed as a gender neutral phenomenon” (Clair in Bingham, 1994, p. 69). Rather, gender must be viewed as a crucial element in understanding and addressing the occurrence of sexual harassment in its myriad of settings and forms (Ormerod et al., 2008). Additionally, research has shown that girls and young women perceive harassment experiences as more threatening, harmful and
distressing than boys and men, which has been linked to their socialization process “within a larger cultural context in which women are more vulnerable to victimization and viewed as less powerful than men” (Ormerod, et al., 2008, p. 115).

Boeku-Betts et al. (1988) contest both that sexual harassment is common in school settings across sub-Saharan Africa and that women are not typically protected and consequently not well positioned to defend themselves in violent or intimidating situations. In attempting to understand why female students are unlikely to report or confront unwanted sexual advances many researchers and psychologists have claimed that females in general have been, “socialized to be less confrontational, less reliant on formal dispute resolution, and more concerned about the effects of their behaviors” (Dziech & Hawkins as cited in Wall, 2000, p. 57). This assessment of the lack of female assertiveness and women’s inability to confront their harassers is supported empirically by the continual wide disparities between experiences of sexual harassment and officially reported incidents. Additionally, in settings where individuals have been socialized to blame female victims of harassment for seducing or provoking male harassers, women and girls are less likely to report incidents of harassment because they fear being held responsible for the inappropriate behavior or interaction (Wible, 2005).

Furthermore, in their research on adolescent sexuality, Moore and Rosenthal (1993) have noted that girls take on the “victim” role and generally accept societal prescribed restrictions and rules both at home and in school which are enforced “for their safety.” These views are manifested in the greater policing of girls than boys from two conflicting standpoints, both because girls are perceived as victims who need to be protected, and also because they are seen as perpetrators who need to control their
sexuality because it provokes male sexual attention. These restrictions include regulation of girls’ hairstyles and length of hair, clothing, make-up, jewelry, and physical appearance and these ideals are reinforced and shared by parents, school administrators, teachers and students of both sexes.

The dual protectionism and vilification of girls is personified in the policing of female students to a greater degree than their male counterparts and is problematic in that it both reinforces stereotypes of female helplessness and blames girls for the formation of teacher-student sexual relationships. The latter perception is grounded in the widespread belief that girls and young women are capable of tempting or provoking male teachers and boy students with their appearance or comportment. Gordon (1998) noted that in Zimbabwe, “girl students were more often perceived, by both male and female teachers, as the initiators of sexual activity than as the victims of sexual harassment and abuse” (Mirembe & Davies, 2001, p. 412). This mentality leads female victims of harassment to believe that what has happened to them is their fault and justifies policies which blame girls for sexual harassment.

The effect of sexual harassment on the overall school environment has been cited as damaging to relationships between male and female students, female achievement, and female enrollment (Roscoe et al., 1994, Stambach, 1998; Wynd, 1999). A recent North American study on school climate in the secondary school setting focused on the effect of perceiving one’s school as tolerant of sexual harassment (Ormerod, Collinsworth, & Perry, 2008). This study found that the perception that school administrations were

---

11 The previously described school policy in Benin which required girl students to shave their heads is an example of these kinds of restrictions.
tolerant of sexual harassment led to more frequent incidents and experiences of sexual harassment on behalf of girl students (Ormerod et al., 2008). Based on this scenario, researchers claimed that perpetrators (school personnel or male students) weighed the likelihood of punishment for their actions on previous administrative sanctions and/or the level of seriousness in which the current school administration had dealt with prior sexual harassment complaints (Ormerod et al., 2008). These results suggest that schools which chose to ignore or downplay the effects of sexual harassment are more likely to experience high rates of sexual harassment, a disturbing possibility if applied to the very low rates of sexual harassment enforcement and reporting across Benin.

As with other behaviors rooted in systems of gerontocracy and/or patriarchy it is important to understand that, “in an environment which condones sexual harassment everyone is a victim, not just those who are direct targets of the harassment” (Strauss, 1992, p. 7). Young male students also emerge as victims of both the harassment of their peers and of the transactional partnerships between their teachers and classmates. Mahaffey (1995) argues that when sexual harassment is treated lightly, “both girls and boys get a damaging message: girls are not worthy of respect and that the appropriate behavior for boys includes exerting power over girls” (p. 39). Furthermore, Ormerod, Collinsworth and Perry (2008) found that the larger implications of, “observing those with little recourse being victimized while authorities tacitly sanction the behavior by ignoring it may send a larger message about justice that has a negative influence on their (boy and girl students) wellbeing” (p. 122). On a similar note, Mohanty (2003) has made similar claims regarding the power of institutions as she states,
The academy and the classroom itself are not mere sites of instruction. They are also political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations over knowledge by different empowered social constituencies. Thus teachers and students produce, reinforce, recreate resist and transform ideas about race, gender, and difference in the classroom. (Mohanty, 2003, p.194).

Schools are not neutral settings but political spaces that have the potential to shape and reinforce power relations. Allowing sexual harassment to occur affects the classroom environment as a whole and influences the socialization of students as they transition to adulthood, including the way they perceive gender.

The implications of these behaviors on boy students are particularly damaging as young males learn to mimic their superiors, thus continuing the cycle. Dziech and Hawkins (1998) in a piece entitled, Male Students: Invisible Casualties, warn that male students often idolize and therefore identify with the perpetrator in situations where they view male instructors as role models. In fact, those who identify with the harasser often “employ a widely recognized defense mechanism of those who are frustrated by their inability to understand a problem or effect change. They blame the victim. This is true even in cases where they are closely associated with the harassers” (Dziech & Hawkins, 1998 as cited in Wall, 2000, p. 56). These mixed messages are problematic as young men read their harassed classmates lack of reaction as proof that women really do not mind such behaviors or crude jokes. It becomes essential that school authorities properly condemn sexually harassing behaviors in order to not only limit future incidents but to continue their larger ethical obligation in developing healthy and socially responsible individuals.
Consensual Amorous Relationships

The major limitation in attempting to use the term sexual harassment to describe all sexual relationships and interactions occurring between teachers and students is that in situations where these relationships are transactional and consensual both parties have a vested interest in maintaining these relationships and the term “harassment” does not seem to as clearly apply. Because sexual relationships between teachers and students and/or incidents of sexual harassment are defined and perceived based on the way in which those involved conceptualize them, it is critical that governments and school administrations use vocabulary which is as accurate and concise as possible in order to be locally understood. Furthermore, “As important as current scientific, legal, and philosophical definitions of sexual harassment are, many of them omit the interpersonal features which define the concept…the mental states of the perpetrator and the victim are the essential defining elements” (Wall, 2000, p. 63). Employing the term sexual harassment (often) implies that the sexual comments, advances or interactions taking place are unwelcome by the recipient; however, these distinctions become hazy as two consenting “adults” may choose to engage in these behaviors. In Benin, the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law makes all sexual encounters between teachers and students forbidden, however the consensual and transactional nature of many of these relationships complicates understandings of sexual harassment and appropriate teacher-student interaction while making enforcement nearly impossible.

From a Western perspective, teacher-student relationships at the secondary school level are universally condemned due to the age of the students involved and cultural norms which denounce any sort of sexual encounter in this setting. However, in the
context of rural Benin, sexual encounters at this level appear to be much a more common occurrence due to various environmental and cultural factors, as well as, the fact that the age of students in secondary schools can vary greatly, allowing students to sometimes be much older. Faced with similar challenges, in her dissertation on the education of Muslim, Fulani girls in Guinea, Baldé (2004) argues that the development of romantic relationships at the secondary level in the United States is not comparable to perceptions of similar relationships at this level in Guinea. Instead, she draws comparisons between female students’ interest in finding a partner at the secondary school level in Guinea and female students at the university level in the US, underlining differences in culturally-based perceptions of maturity, sexual debut and marriage. Therefore, in the following analysis Western university-based literature on consensual amorous relationships will be used in comparison with and in reference to African secondary-school literature and realities to examine teacher-student sexual interactions and relationships.

Despite the supposed consensual labeling of many teacher-student sexual partnerships, it has been contested that these relationships are neither appropriate nor permitted in the academic setting because of the inherent power asymmetries between the two parties involved, as with such unbalanced inequalities in power, “true” consent is not attainable. Moreover, consensual romantic relationships between teachers and students occurring within the zone of instruction “carry the presumption of coercion” because of the inherent asymmetry in teacher-student power, rendering “the consensual nature of the relationships suspect” (Wall, 2000 pp. 31-34). Typically in this circumstance, the academic institution has a “compelling interest in preserving academic integrity and safeguarding students from duress and exploitation” (Wall, 2000, p. 33). In these
situations it is nearly impossible to determine whether students are truly consenting to participate in the relationship or if they are acting on behalf of a fear of adverse consequences by which they are compelled to enter or to continue to engage in “undesired intimate relationships with faculty members…even when such duress is not [explicitly] intended by the faculty member” (Wall, 2000, p. 33). Furthermore, these relationships become problematic as other students may feel or assume that a romantic relationship between their teacher and fellow classmate is resulting in an “unfair academic advantage” (Wall, 2000, p. 33).

Furthermore, male students are situated in a double bind whereby they either attempt to intervene on behalf of their female classmates and risk becoming a new target for their teacher, or they choose to ignore sexual harassment until it is internalized as normal or natural. As previously mentioned, in some situations male students turn on their classmates who have been harassed and develop a “blame the victim mentality” whereby they assume the girl is using her sexuality or femininity to attract the teacher’s attention and receive an unfair academic advantage (Wall, 2000). This situation delegitimizes female students’ work as it puts any grade she receives into question. Did she receive a high grade because her work merited it or is she dating the teacher? Did she fail the midterm because her work was poor or did she refuse a teacher’s advances? Issues of transparency in regard to the involved teacher’s subjectivity, both real and imagined, damage the academic climate for all students and jeopardize the integrity of the institution and classroom setting.

Although the occurrence of teacher-student relationships outside the bounds of the instructional context are free from the presumption that the intimate relationship resulted
from coercion or is effecting the teacher’s grading subjectivity, Hoffman writing in the Harvard Educational Review (1986) posits that, “amorous relationships between faculty and students are generally inappropriate and risky because they jeopardize the integrity of academia and the ethics of the educator student relationship” (Wall, 2000, p. 105). Zalk, Paludi, and Dederich (1990) offer a compelling analysis of the psychological power differentials inherit in all teacher-student relationships, even when the teacher is not directly supervising, advising or teaching the student. They argue that “knowledge and wisdom are power” particularly in the education setting where “students’ adolescent idealism exaggerates its extent” (Wall, 2000, pp. 109-110). In societies where age alone implies advanced levels of knowledge and status, the result of this power differential is compounded. Therefore, one can infer the effect this perceived level of superiority and good judgment has on a “student who is singled out as ‘special’ by the professor” (Wall, 2000, p. 110).

Furthermore, the entire concept and definition of consensual amorous relationships is fraught with ambiguity due to both the haziness of cultural conceptualizations of the age of consent (when an individual is considered an adult able to make informed choices and decisions) and the ability to give consent within power hierarchies at an institutional level (teacher-student imbalance of power) and at the societal level (patriarchal world system). In the United States, societal perceptions of age, maturity and, consent have created an invisible barrier somewhat arbitrarily at the age of eighteen to separate children from adults. The argument here is not that age is merely a number, that some girls mature faster than others, or that girls in some cultures mature faster than others (an argument which has been used to justify abhorrent racist cross-
cultural sexual encounters in the past) but to identify the fact that fixating a number (age) to a fluid social construct (maturity: sexual, mental, physical) is an arbitrary, ambiguous and imperfect task, one which is often accepted, rejected and debated about within and between states and individuals. Likewise, Philippe Aries problematizes “the development of the west’s current construction of childhood as a long, innocent period needing protection,” a development he sees as both contemporary and socio-economically and culturally-based (as quoted in Agustin, 2007, p. 70). He describes the disconnect which occurs when Western advocates attempt to impose this notion on other cultures. They may for example, “come into conflict both with societies that distinguish between pre- and post pubescent youth, allowing the latter to have sex, wed and assume responsibilities, and with societies that routinely put all able children to work” practices which we once engaged in during our own development but have since moved beyond (Agustin, 2007, p. 70).

In the West African context, because secondary school teachers in rural areas are often perceived as ideal mates due to their privileged position in the upper echelons of socio-economic hierarchies (both because of their education level and monthly government paycheck, which separates them from the agriculturalist majority) it is essential to consider the motivating factors behind school girls’ attraction and openness to initiating a relationship with these individuals. The term “sexual harassment” does not allow space for this level of analysis which is problematic as many of the relationships occurring between teachers and their students are perceived as consensual.

Furthermore, meretricious intimacies between adolescent school girls and their teachers can and do occur in a very transactional fashion whereby girls exchange sex or
sexual behaviors for money, material possessions and/or grades. “Sugar daddy,” an American slang term for a rich man who offers money or gifts to a less wealthy younger female, in return for sexual favors, has been appropriated and adopted in Beninois culture coined as, “papa gâteau” relationships, the French version of the term. In recent literature, the “sugar daddy syndrome” has been increasingly examined in the African context because of the array of dangerous implications and possibilities in this previously unexplored setting (Luke, 2003). Luke's (2003) comprehensive literature review of forty-five qualitative and quantitative studies across sub-Saharan Africa, showed that sugar daddy or cross-generational, transactional relationships are increasingly common throughout the continent and because of the large age and economic asymmetries at play, female partners are at an increased risk of HIV/AIDS infection and of experiencing unplanned/unwanted pregnancy because of a decreased odds of condom usage. Additionally, Luke (2003) found that although evidence suggests that, “girls have considerable negotiating power over certain aspects of sexual relationships with older men, including partnership formation and continuation…they have little control over sexual practices within partnerships, including condom use and violence” (p. 67). These topics in the school setting are underrepresented in academic research but will be thoroughly discussed in the analysis portion of this research, as it was a topic that came up repeatedly in interviews with parents, students, and teachers.

Adolescent Female Sexual Agency

Throughout the world a double standard in conceptualizations of sexual agency between the sexes is sustained as male hyper-sexuality is accepted as natural or normal whereas female hyper-sexuality is condemned and censored (Barnett & Blaikie, 1992).
Cultural discourses surrounding female sexuality in particular are rife with tensions between contending binaries that portray sexuality as either totally gratifying and free or entirely dangerous and oppressive, when in reality, “The hallmark of sexuality is its complexity: its multiple meanings, sensations, and connections...Sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency” (Vance, 1984, pp. 327-328).

As stated previously, adolescent girls are more often controlled in comparison to their male counterparts both because there is a societal fear that they will “lose their purity” or become pregnant and because they are held accountable for seducing men. Girls find themselves more tightly policed by society and typically accept all of the restrictions and rules prescribed for them because they have been socialized to believe that they can prevent unwanted male attention by limiting their own level of attractiveness and sexuality if they abide by societal sanctions. Women are often held accountable for “provoking” men whether they refute male advances or give-in to sexual desires. Raising a female child is seen as a delicate task, in which parents must control and restrict all interactions and relationships outside of the home.

In Niger, like elsewhere in the world, “the adolescent or pre-adolescent girl is at a difficult state: she is too young to be trusted to behave appropriately, to keep her sexuality hidden and to avoid getting into trouble with the weak male who may fall victim to her charm. For the parents and family, the adolescent girl has the potential to bring a great deal of trouble to the family” (Wynd, 1999, p.111). In studies from across the African continent parents expressed fears that, “While attending school, the girls will be spending a great deal of time around boys who could take advantage of them, perhaps
more threatening, the girls will be under the responsibility of a male teacher who will have ample time to take advantage of his position and authority” (Wynd, 1999, p. 111).

These fears are evident in the number of parents who restrict their daughters’ access to formal education as they are reluctant to grant the trust of protecting their daughters’ purity to male teachers who often come from outside of the community. Women and girls are stuck between a rock and a hard place in that they are given the responsibility of controlling not only their own sexuality but held liable for keeping in check the sexuality of men, while remaining submissive to male whims and desires.

Adolescent female sexuality is a topic, which is rarely discussed in terms outside of reproductive and sexual health, promiscuity, exploration/experimentation, rape or violence despite its wide array of complexities and possibilities. In the context of sexual relationships between teachers and students in schools, many sexual interactions may be viewed as a demonstration of sexual agency on the part of female students as an alternative form of power and control. In order to escape the dichotomy of “powerful” versus “powerless” and to generate solutions that address the condition from those in the “powerless” position, we first need to recognize the efficacy of alternative forms of power practiced by the “powerless” (De Certeau, 1984, as cited in Foss & Rogers as cited in Bingham, 1994, p. 162). Although there is danger in conceding that women can control, negotiate and use their sexuality for personal benefit, when focusing on young women as active social agents versus victims of their sexuality (with varying degrees of repercussions and benefits for both arguments), it is worth examining the level of female agency at play in meretricious teacher-student sexual relationships due to the transactional nature of much sexual exchange. “This viewpoint highlights the consensual
nature of asymmetric relationships…and emphasizes that girls have learned that their sexuality is a valued resource” (Luke, 2003. p.77). Nevertheless, researchers discussing adolescent female sexuality find themselves in a double bind, whereby focusing on only the pleasure aspects of sexuality, they neglect the unavoidable patriarchal structures in which women operate, but when emphasizing only the violent elements, they ignore actual women’s experiences with sexual agency and self empowerment (Vance, 1984). Examining young women’s use of their sexuality as a tactical form of power (versus men’s more strategic form of power) can shift the female sexuality discourse from victim or harlot centered to agency oriented (in non-coercive scenarios).

Hence, considering consent in the previous discourse alone (that consent is not possible because the teacher always has more power than the student, or the male always has power over the female) is problematic because although it aims to “protect”, “help”, “save” or “rescue” the often female “victims” from being taken advantage of, exploited or hurt, it also negates their individual agency, voice and power (Agustin, 2007). Furthermore, too often development agencies and programs have continued the colonial mission of “salvation” and perpetuated the girls as victims discourse without considering the repercussions of their arguments (Agustin, 2007). Within the margins and between the lines of academic research focused on girls’ education and teacher to student “sexual harassment” comes the alarming notion that girls may in fact be engaging in these relationships based on degrees of their own agency.

Luke's (2003) work on age and economic asymmetrical sexual relationships in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that there has been a general trend over the last century in which women and girls have begun to examine the economic potential of their bodies and
sexuality. This commoditization of sex has become so pervasive that, “gifts have become a symbol of [a] girl's worth and a man's interest, and girls feel offended if they do not receive something in return for sex” (Luke, 2003, p. 73). In fact, one study in Burkina Faso found that, “A girl would feel humiliated and disrespected if she received nothing for engaging in sex” (Görgen et al., 1993, p. 290). In another study on adolescent sexual and reproductive health in Zambia, researchers Simasiku, Nkama, and Munro (2000) found that the average age for sexual debut for girls was 10 years of age and the reasons for “indulging” in early sex “ranged from the need of money, peer pressure, curiosity, for pleasure or fun to obtaining favours such as sweets or assistance with homework” (p. 43). Similarly, another 1997 study in Tanzania found that girls as young as 10 or 11 were “lured into sexual relations with older men for 'chips,' Coco-Cola, transport to school… or just extra little things” (Fuglesang, 1997, p. 1,252). Despite the alarming implications that young girls are using sex as a bargaining chip for other wants, needs and desires, it is difficult to deny that girls and young women are using their bodies in a very transactional fashion, one which has transformed the value and purpose of sex.

Another aspect of transactional manipulation or strategy on the part of some girls and their families is the use of pregnancy as a means to persuade partners to marry them (Luke, 2003). Numerous studies have shown that oftentimes, either girls choose older partners in order to secure a more economically stable future or families pressure their daughters to form or accept relationships with older, wealthier men (Calvès et al., 1996; Rasch et al. 2000, Gregson et al. 2002). On a different note, other research suggests that adolescent girls often do not love their older partners and have no intention of marrying them but maintain relationships with boyfriends their own age, whom they eventually
intend to marry (Calvès et al., 1996; Rasch et al. 2000). These girls simultaneously sustain two relationships, one with a peer for love and the other, less serious relationship with an older man (or men) for material benefits (Luke, 2003). Similarly, another study focusing on the sexual practices of female secondary school students in Uganda found that girls often practiced “detoothing” a system whereby “girls milk as much money as possible out of their partners without giving sexual favors in return” (Luke, 2003, p. 74; Nyanzi et al. 2000). Here girls essentially lead older men on as long as possible without having to reciprocate sexually, however some girls mentioned that these relationships may end with violence or rape in cases where the man becomes frustrated and feels as though he has been taken advantage of. Interestingly, however, none of the adolescents interviewed in any of the studies reviewed here made any association between these economic exchanges and prostitution (Luke, 2003). This analysis puts forward the notion that most girls' experiences are situated in between the contending victim versus perpetrator discourses, “They [adolescent females] are not entirely victims, yet they are not entirely in control of their sexual relationships” (Luke, 2003, p. 77).

Agency and consent in this context is certainly taboo and problematic due to the power dynamics and ages of the girls involved. However, at the very essence of quid pro quo harassment is the possibility of gaining something in exchange for something else, as demonstrated in the various case studies above. When direct elements of coercion are not at play, the possibility that some girls are accepting sexual relationships with their teachers in return for favors (which would not otherwise be withheld from them based on their non-compliance) demonstrates that some girls are evoking a degree of choice and agency. Laura Marila Agustin in her controversial 2007 book, *Sex at the Margins,*
deconstructs and challenges the dominant prostitution or meretricious relationship discourse claiming that it is little more than a social construct and not significantly different than other forms of work, trade or interaction. She claims that women who use their bodies for financial, material or other gains are much more than passive victims but oftentimes agents of their own lives, making their own decisions while surviving and resisting often otherwise dire situations. The idea that the use of female sexuality and the commodification of sex can empower women is a cultural taboo across geographic locations because female sexuality in its own right “is nearly always imbued with moralizing ideologies and ethical critiques, theories and proposals” (p. 194).

Although some of her conceptualizations of consent and agency may be perceived as extreme, Agustin condemns, Europeans who attempt to “rescue” adolescent migrants selling sex who she claims, “at sixteen or seventeen may be considered adults in their own home cultures, say[ing] that they cannot have consented to what they are doing (even if they say they have)” (Agustin, 2007, p. 70). Concurring with this idea, Heather Montgomery acknowledges that, “forcing children to accept that they are ‘prostitutes’ (or ‘exploited’ or ‘abused’ sexually) denies ‘the skillful way that they use what very small amount of control that they have’” (as quoted in Agustin, 2007, p. 70). Without completely agreeing with these conceptions of consent, as neither author adequately problematizes the environmental or economic issues which drive many of these women and girls into these situations¹², the idea of permitting these women and girls to represent themselves and voice their own stories, circumstances, and emotions is a critical step in

¹² Unlike Agustin I do not perceive of consent under dire economic restraints or other situations of desperation as wholly consensual by nature. I see choice as very much influenced by the lack or abundance of alternatives.
fostering empowerment and agency on behalf of those who often have so few other outlets in which to express themselves. Agustin reiterates this belief as she scathingly remarks,

Were government employees, political appointees, feminists, NGO spokespersons, academics and other social agents able to shed their certainty of knowing how everyone else should live, they might be able to dispense with neocolonialism, admit that agency can be expressed in a variety of ways, acknowledge their own desires, and accept that… [the world’s] dynamic, changing, risking diversity is here to stay” (p. 194).

Therefore, the challenge is always to reevaluate, deconstruct, and rebuild in an image that is one step closer to achieving any level of equality and social justice (Smith, 1999). The first step is to be cognizant of the various “systems of domination” or “relations of ruling” which influence and intersect the lives of those operating in various positionalities across the globe (Mohanty, 2003; Smith, 1999). “It is also by understanding these intersections that we can attempt to explore questions of consciousness and agency without naturalizing either individuals or structures” (Smith, 1987 as quoted in Mohanty, 2003, pp. 55-56). The concept of consent, agency, and power are all interwoven themes entangled in post/neo colonial discourses regarding “third world women”, girls’ education, female reproductive and sexual health and female sexuality. Deeper explorations of these topics and their position in the larger organizational intersections of race, gender, class, age and culture is the first step in understanding sexual harassment and/or transactional sexual relationships between teachers and their students.

Abuse of Power and Cultural Theory

Deeply imbedded in sexual harassment theory and the formation of teacher-student sexual relationships is the presence of unequal power dynamics between the two
individuals involved, which arguably influence and limit the ability of the student to engage in truly consensual relationships with her superior (teacher). This inability to actually consent is grounded in students’ subordinate positionality within the overall power hierarchy, in addition to female students’ positionality as women in the larger patriarchal world system. Sexual harassment and many teacher-student sexual relationships are not necessarily about sexual attraction, but are always about power—“more specifically, the misuse and abuse of power” (Strauss, 1992). McKinney and Maroules (1991) note, “Whether formal or informal, organizational or diffuse, real or perceived, status differences between victims and offenders are the root of the problem of sexual harassment” (p. 35). Teacher-student sexual relationships and sexual harassment tend to be accepted and ignored for the most part because these “stories” fit into the already existing discourse that boys will be boys and that sexual interactions between men and women are normal and natural. However, language or behaviors which intimidate or degrade females’ bodies put restraints on girl students’ classroom participation while ensuring subordination to boys and men in interactions in and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, power disparities are exacerbated when the already empowered boys harass the already disenfranchised girls (Mirembe & Davies, 2001). Harassment in the classroom translates to boys controlling the educational setting and educational experience, forcing girls into silence (Mirembe & Davies, 2001).

In various patrilineal societies across the globe, women are often in a subject position, first to their fathers and then later to their husbands (Mirembe & Davies, 2001). The subservience of women is perpetuated due to its acceptance by the majority of individuals from both sexes. Law professor and feminist activist Catherine MacKinnon
(1979) argues that sexual harassment is a subversive tool used to maintain the uneven power relations between the sexes and keep women in their subordinate position to men by constantly reinforcing the larger world order that controls and exploits women’s sexuality. Clair (1994) claims that “sexual harassment is a discursive political tool of oppression that has become entangled and enmeshed in distorted communication practices” (as cited in Bingham, 1994, p. 59). Women have become socialized to accept sexually harassing behavior as normal or worse, natural and harmless. They have been told that they are being too sensitive, that they should laugh it off, that they have no sense of humor and that they should be team players. Adolescents have been socialized to idolize their intellectual superiors, to learn from their teachers and to be flattered when an academic “takes interest” in their work, wellbeing and future. Due to the dangerous implications of the prevalence and continued acceptability of sexual harassment in the public sphere, Clair (1994) warns that, “the reality of its epidemic and pandemic proportions cannot be underestimated, questioned or tolerated, nor can its insidious nature and repercussions be dismissed” (as cited in Bingham, 1994, p. 59). On the same note, MacKinnon (1979) argues that,

Sexual harassment perpetuates the interlocked structure by which women have been kept sexually in thrall to men and at the bottom of the labor market. Two forces of American society converge: men’s control over women’s sexuality and capital control over employees’ work lives. Women historically have been required to exchange sexual services for material survival, in one form or another. Prostitution and marriage as well as sexual harassment in different ways institutionalize this arrangement (p. 174).

Deeply embedded societal or cultural issues and power dynamics regarding gender, age, class, ethnicity, religion and culture are implicit in relationships of power and crucial
points of exploration in examining and addressing sexual relationships between students and their teachers.

In a study entitled, “Sexual Harassment of Adolescents Perpetrated by Teachers and Peers: An Exploration of the Dynamics of Power, Culture, and Gender in Secondary Schools”, Timmerman (2003) explains that although most academics do not use or even have an explicit theoretical perspective to explain or describe sexual harassment and/or incidents of teacher-student sexual relationships at the secondary school level, there are a myriad of theories that can be used to identify and explore aspects of the phenomenon: biological, developmental, pathological, abuse of power and/or cultural theories. Because the framing of these relationships and/or sexual harassment on biological terms becomes problematic as harassers become the victims of their own biological sex drive, on the level of academic research, only the abuse of power theory and cultural theories have ever been applied to empirical research on the topic (Lee et al., 1996; Stein et al., 1993; Timmerman, 2003). Problems emerge with these two theories as power imbalances between teachers and students are assumed rather than empirically proven, while harassment between students is often viewed as “normal adolescent behavior” they are oftentimes non-egalitarian power dynamics in these relationships as well, including differences in age, class, ethnicity and gender (Timmerman, 2003).

One of the most frequently cited conceptualizations of power theory involves the abuse of organizational power. Organizations and institutions are sites in which individuals uphold and negotiate different levels of access to resources and power positions (Foucault, 1983; Timmerman, 2003). “Schooling is not only about formal surveillance but also informal control. [And] sexual harassment is a manifestation of
informal power, a form of social control practiced mainly by one group of people—the controlling group—on another group” (Mirembe & Davies, 2001, p. 412). In the school setting, teachers and administrators maintain a level of power over students, which often leads to the facilitation of sexual harassment-based interactions or the initiation of sexual relationships between teachers and their students. Although critically useful, abuse of organizational power theory is lacking in its explanation of why sexual harassment has such an overwhelming gender-specific pattern (male to female harassment) and does not address issues of peer to peer harassment (Timmerman, 2003).

Another layer of conceptualizations of power, which addresses these levels of abuse, is rooted in the abuse of societal power perspective, which states that that male dominance at the societal level manifests itself in the majority of incidents of male to female harassment and relationship initiation. “Both men and women consent to a patriarchal system and, subsequently, fail to recognize how that system can ‘distort reality and destroy human potential, female and male’” (Daly, 1973, p. 7 as cited in Clair, in Bingham, 1994, p. 60). Recognition that sexual harassment and teacher-student sexual interactions are pervasive and harmful practices for both sexes, individually and in respect to their relationship with one another, is a critical component of understanding and defining actual activities taking place on the ground.

Culturally-based theories differ from abuse of power perceptions in that they do not focus as much on the power positions between individuals as they do on the environment which supports or facilitates sexual harassment and/or sexual encounters between teachers and their students. May and Hughes (1987) contest that, “the difference in social status between women and men which affords men the opportunity and
encouragement to dominate women reflects how sexual harassment is an issue of power” (as cited in Wall, 2000, p. 70). Sexual harassment can be viewed as a cultural phenomenon both because it often occurs privately but within the public sphere and due to the fact that its suspected prevalence makes it a daily part of school culture. Here, “school culture” is viewed as an environment or community, “where individuals share norms and values, such as ethical or moral bonds… [and] From this perspective, sexual harassment is viewed as a sign of inadequate attention to norms, values, and daily behavior in schools” (Timmerman, 2003, p. 232). This approach is extremely useful as it “challenges the common assumption that unwanted sexual advances take place in secret and that the victim does not talk about these experiences because of shame, fear of revenge by the perpetrator, or fear of being blamed” (Timmerman, 2003, pp. 232-233). Timmerman (2003) emphasizes that perceptions of sexual harassment or teacher-student relationships as societal taboos are not consistent with the ever-growing wealth of cultural perspective-based research that has documented these behaviors as more often than not public phenomena as opposed to deep dark secrets occurring in hidden or underground settings. Individuals and communities are aware that these interactions are occurring and oftentimes, even know who is involved. Sexual harassment has indeed been accepted as normalized phenomenon but it is unique in that although the harassment often occurs in the public domain it is usually deemed as a personal or private experience (MacKinnon, 1979). The blurry separation between the public and private sphere in regards to sexual harassment has enabled the discourse of silence surrounding the phenomenon.
The disproportional amount of teacher to student and male to female sexual harassment credits abuse of power theories in regards to the power dynamics of those initiating these interactions. Culturally-based perspectives are also confirmed due to the frequency of incidents and/or the daily occurrences of these interactions experienced by individuals. Furthermore, considering the fact that an overwhelming number of students, who claim to have been sexually harassed, describe the location of sexual harassment based behaviors and incidents as very public: hallways, corridors, classrooms and school yards, it appears that sexual harassment is frequently a public occurrence. “According to researchers, the pervasiveness of sexual harassment among students indicates that the problem is related to the school environment... [And] high schools are dominated by a school culture in which unwanted sexual attention is part of students’ everyday experience” (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Lee et al, 1996; Stein, 1995 as cited in Timmerman, 2003).

A study on gender, power relations and school culture in Uganda found that schools were sites of “an extensive set of gendered practices which constituted a risk in themselves in terms of sexual health” which included an examination of four forms of control; hegemonic masculinity, gendered discipline patterns, sexual harassment and ‘compulsory’ heterosexuality (Mirembe & Davies, 2001, p. 401). This study, appropriately titled, “Is Schooling a Risk?”, convincingly argues that “male domination and power imbalances in the school encouraged attitudes and practices with regard to sexual relationships which negated the official messages of the AIDS curriculum” (p.401). As previously mentioned additional studies have shown that male students who witness sexual harassment between their teachers and female classmates begin to associate
femininity as “a weapon used to acquire control and an unfair advantage over males” and begin to mimic behaviors and attitudes that “put women in their place” or treat women as objects for their “personal self indulgence” (Dziech & Hawkins, 1998, as cited in Wall, 2000, p. 57). The sexual harassment of predominately female students by teachers and their male counterparts occurs throughout the world in strikingly similar patterns reinforced by both cultural and organizational abuse of power dynamics.

These theories have been employed in the framing of this research because of their relevance to the power and cultural dynamics at play in the construction, acceptance and maintenance of teacher-student sexual relationships. As the majority of these relationships emerge as being both transactional and perceived as consensual throughout my field research, it became crucial to explore the systemic and environmental factors at play in the initiation of these sexual encounters and relationships. Asymmetrical power dynamics between teachers and their students matched, oftentimes, with parental and societal acceptance, deeply rooted in poverty, are critical elements to explore in generating a clear understanding of how and why these relationships continue to be so prevalent, despite both national law and school policies which prohibit these interactions.

**Significance of the Study**

Unfortunately, after nearly fifty years of political independence, educational reforms, and extensive aid and development targeted at girls’ education, access and retention of girls in the formal education sector is still problematic throughout Benin. Internationally, those specializing in sexual harassment theory, law, and research have noted that,
Clearer understanding of sexual harassment, how it keeps happening, and the ways it might be stopped may require us to develop different ways of understanding the phenomenon and, with that, alternative ways of studying and responding to it…Scholars might ask…what issues we have not yet been able to address and/or understand and what factors both in ourselves as researchers and in the phenomenon we study are impeding our understanding (Bingham, 1994, p. 1).

The fact that there is currently very little literature about sexual harassment and/or teacher-student sexual relationships occurring in schools in Francophone, West Africa in general, and even less on Benin specifically, demonstrates an immediate need for more scholarly exploratory research on the topic. As quantitative data proves inadequate of fully capturing the issues and obstacles surrounding girls’ education and the effects of sexual encounters between female students and their teachers, there remains a dire need for more holistic qualitative research that allows space for voice and agency on the part of those actually involved in the phenomenon (Baldé, 2004; Sen, 1999).

As explored in the greater part of this literature review, there have been three major studies exclusively examining sexual harassment and teacher-student sexual relationships in Benin’s classrooms including, one nationwide sexual harassment workshop sponsored by WiLDAF, one Southern-based study on girls’ education via two large student focus groups by Wible (2005) and one other nationwide NGO-sponsored survey questionnaire led by Victory Way (2007). However, each of these studies had various limitations and drawbacks which will be explored here.

The Victory Way survey was problematic in the sense that participants were restricted from giving open-ended responses or justifications to questions thereby, highlighting the prevalence of these behaviors without addressing the underlying causes or reasoning behind them. WiLDAF and Wible’s (2005) workshop and focus groups
were equally problematic as they occurred before the creation of the 2006 Sexual
Harassment Law and concluded with the belief that creation of a national law would
drastically diminish incidents of sexual harassment, a belief which has turned out to be false.

An additional problem with the current research in Benin is that it has almost
exclusively been conducted by men, despite the fact that the victims of these taboo
interactions are often young girls. This concern about reflexivity, representation and
voice can be extended to another problematic gap in the literature which includes an
overall lack of community engagement and dialogue about the issue. Without the
involvement of all stakeholders, it has been difficult to examine the root causes of the
phenomenon and create viable solutions. Parents have been excluded from much of the
research process despite the fact that various studies have indicated that parents may very
well be “complicit in the non-enforcement of the law” (Quist-Arcton, 2003). From
personal observations and conversations I had with students, parents, teachers, and school
administrators in Benin, prior to my research, I believed that valuable unexplored
questions gauging the perceived risks and benefits of these forms of relationships on the
behalf of girls and/or their parents was crucial in creating an understanding of the
presence and prevalence of this phenomenon post-legislation. This much more nuanced
approach goes beyond yes and no survey questions and is based on interviewees’ own
accounts and perceptions of these sexual encounters. This research approach not only
aims to open space for agency on behalf of the female students and male teachers
involved in these relationships, but also gives these individuals an opportunity to voice
their opinions, justify their actions, and describe their perspectives of these issues. The
possibility of complacency on the behalf of parents and/or students remains unexplored across existing studies, despite the fact that there appears to be financial motivation behind the acceptance or initiation of these relationships, as teachers in rural Benin seem to represent lucrative or ideal partners for rural girls from agricultural backgrounds. This same possibility is also crucial on an enforcement and implementation level as both parties appear to have vested interests in maintaining these transactional sexual exchanges.

Another prominent gap in the exploration of this topic is rooted in the geographic location of the major studies and surveys which have already taken place. The majority of academic research has focused on the more developed, urban, South of Benin. To date, there is not a single study, which focuses exclusively on the economically and culturally marginalized North. The practice of outsourcing new teachers from the “more educated” and “developed” South to the rural North creates an interesting dynamic, which has yet to be explored in any previous sexual harassment study. Furthermore, more often than not, relocated teachers are not from the same ethnic or language group as their students or other adults in the community, limiting interpersonal relationships outside of school. This trend is exacerbated by the fact that much of the adult population works in the agricultural sector and has only recently had access to educational opportunities, making communication in Benin’s lingua franca, French, difficult at best. Language in Benin creates observable social barriers between the educated and uneducated, outsider and insider, urban and rural.

These economic hierarchies, which place teachers among the top-income earners in rural communities, have the potential of making teachers the most popular bachelors in
town. In his book on education practices in the rural community of Yekuwa in southern Niger, Miles (1994) includes a section entitled, “Teachers as Role Models”, in which he explains a similar phenomenon.

[In] Yekuwa teachers, like all Nigerien fonctionnaires\textsuperscript{13}, are periodically reassigned to posts throughout Niger, and may have little or no prior exposure to the local community where they teach… The[se] schoolteachers are given government housing and rarely leave the village. They are typically relatively young…and virtually never socialized with the villagers. They wore Western clothes (shirts and tight trousers), always moved and acted as a trio, and, especially in public, spoke French to one another. Their demeanor… exuded authority and thinly veiled condescension toward the uneducated— that is, virtually everyone else in Yekuwa” (239)

A potentially dangerous situation emerges as both young, single teachers and married teachers (most of whom leave their family in the South and remain alone for two to seven years visiting their family on school breaks and holidays throughout the year) are left entirely unaccountable for their actions and relationships. Both scenarios bring solitary men into rural agricultural communities for extended periods of time. These phenomena leave new outsiders isolated, lonely and unaccountable for their actions because of the geographical distance between them and their social networks.

Furthermore teachers view their temporary placement in the North as a forced public service to the “underdeveloped” North and see their time there as a mandatory banishment from “civilization”. Miles’ (1994) research further demonstrates the civil servant system in Niger which strikingly resembles its ex-colonial counterpart system in Benin both on its level of organization and the mentality of those involved.

In Niger, government employment is virtually a sine qua non of financial security and moderate prosperity. While most primary school teachers probably aspire to higher positions within the official Nigerien hierarchy and are not happy to be

\textsuperscript{13} French for civil servants
“banished” to a rural area, they would never look outside the civil service for a career” (Miles, 1994, pp. 242-243).

Outside of Miles’ (1994) research, the implications of this occurrence has yet to be examined in existing research and has the potential of contributing a wealth of information about the quality of Northern education and the dynamics of teacher-student sexual relationships in this setting.

Overall, “more work is needed to break open the boxes that surround ‘target groups’ and recognize the complexity and fluidity of sexual and reproductive identities and experiences in different cultural contexts” (Cornwall & Welbourn, 2000, pp. 14-15). Adolescent female sexual agency is a topic which is extremely underrepresented across academic research particularly in the African setting. Any mention of these young women’s sexuality and sexual experience are fraught with negative or control based topics such as reproductive health, pregnancy, rape, abortion, female circumcision and HIV/AIDS. There is a void in understanding how this segment of the population views their own sexual agency (or lack thereof) and this gap has been an obstacle in exploring the motivations and justifications behind female student participation in teacher-student sexual relationships. This research hopes to be illuminating in the area of opening space for young women to describe their own sexual experiences.
Chapter Two

Methodology Introduction

In this study, I explored sexual relationships between teachers and students from an ethnographic perspective that attempts to categorize and conceptualize teacher-student sexual relationships via culturally specific classifications, value systems, and perceptions, through face-to-face, one-on-one interviews, focus group sessions, and personal observations. Emic research allowed for observations, personal experiences, descriptions, and analyses to be expressed in terms that were perceived as appropriate, representative and meaningful by community members within the culture and community being studied (Pike, 1967). A qualitative method of inquiry allowed me to conduct research based on assumptions and observations of these relationships in their natural setting with the ability to analyze and interpret personal accounts, and was used to generate and gather descriptive data (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative research “is largely an investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of a study” (Creswell, 2008, p.161; Miles & Huberman, 1984). This type of exploratory approach is extraordinarily advantageous with this topic, as there has yet to be a substantial body of literature about teacher-student sexual relationships in Benin’s education system, and there has been little to no attempt to understand the phenomenon from an emic viewpoint. Examining these relationships via qualitative research allowed my sampling to be purposeful and guided by both a specific research question and more general efforts to represent the target phenomenon in its natural setting and context from an idiographic perspective (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). In other words, based on my experiences teaching and living in rural,
northern, Benin I used my personal connections and already established trust networks to generate candid responses and thoughtful reflections about teacher-student sexual relationships.

The conceptual frameworks employed in this research have been critical throughout the research process in selecting an appropriate methodology, framing the research questions and interpreting and analyzing data.

Conceptual frameworks are critical to research because they have valuative implications and govern how researches deal with fundamental issues such as the questions we ask, the categories of analysis we deem as appropriate, the way in which we shape our interpretation and our findings and to whose interest our overall research serves or marginalizes (Fisher, 1978; Foss & Foss, 1989).

Throughout this work a functionalist framework was employed because of its ability to incorporate a multi prong approach in the conceptualization of sexual harassment. This macro-based world view permits researchers to consider the relationships between various parts of society and to analyze how these parts in turn function to support and maintain the continuation of the whole social system including behavioral, legal and power-oriented or structural understandings of the phenomenon (Bingham, 1994). All of these elements are essential in any analysis of the complexities of these relationships because of the myriad individual experiences and definitions of the term and the interdisciplinary nature of those currently researching the topic, from biologists and cultural anthropologists to feminists, lawyers and psychologists.

A second but equally important level of analysis was adopted in order to include a discursive conceptualization of sexual harassment, one which,

Understands communication as creating and shaping social reality rather than just being influenced by it...[and] views social structures as produced and reproduced in discursive practices...[Here,] [d]iscourse is recognized not only as reproducing
oppressive conditions which sustain sexual harassment, but also as a means for transforming and freeing people from those conditions (Bingham, 1994, p. 9).

Viewing sexual harassment as a discursive practice with both latent and manifest functions, this research aims to alter the predominate discourses surrounding the phenomenon which have been used to silence victims and trivialize their experiences (Bingham, 1994). In the past, discourses have been maintained which, “silence victims of sexual harassment by reproducing and instilling in individuals the normalcy of oppressive conditions and practices, and by reconstructing experiences that would oppose the status quo” (p. 10). The unfortunate reality of sexual harassment reporting and the discussion of teacher-student sexual relationships in the media is that the trivialization of the phenomenon has become the primary means through which its “invisibility has been enforced” (MacKinnon, 1979, p. 52). An unspoken code of silence surrounding issues of sexual harassment,

Lulls people into complacency that harassment is not a problem, creates skepticism and mistrust of the system among students (which mitigates against victims filing complaints), and leads victims to believe that they are alone in experiencing harassment, thus encouraging them (and others) to blame themselves (Dziech & Weiner, 1990, as cited in Bingham, 1994, p. 49).

As discussed in the first chapter, the power asymmetries existing within these relationships are often steeped in intersections among gender socialization, sexuality and dominance.

This study acknowledges and engages in the power of storytelling as a public discourse to reconstruct understandings of teacher-student sexual relationships, as well as both a method of catharsis and a means to validate individual experiences and link them to a greater oppressive structure (Bingham, 1994). “Through women coming together,
building collaborative stories, we are much closer to a better understanding of sexual harassment’ (Muir & Magnus as cited in Bingham, 1994, p. 104). A large scale example of this form of consciousness-raising arose in the American context following the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas proceedings. Using this trial as a catalyst for breaking open public discourse surrounding sexual harassment, women began to tell their own stories, make up their own definitions of sexual harassment and reported feeling more empowered (Muir & Magnus as cited in Bingham, 1994). Studies based on lawsuits, call-in radio, talk show programs and magazine editorials at this time showed an increase in reporting among women and a new sensitivity in men who claimed to be more aware and attentive to their own actions (Muir and Magnus as cited in Bingham, 1994). Communication researchers studying the media’s affect on dialogue surrounding sexual harassment found that, “Much of the change in talk about sexual harassment has come about through education and public forums (Muir & Magnus in Bingham, 1994, p. 104). Women need to have the ability to challenge predominate discourses which do not represent their own experiences of the phenomenon but are so rarely given the forum to do so. Overall, this research approach aims to allow me, as the researcher, to “collaborate with participants in establishing an action agenda for change,” focused on “helping individuals free themselves from constraints….in the relationships of power in educational settings”, while aiming to “unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination” by creating “a political debate and discussion” to facilitate these changes (Creswell, 2008; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, pp. 597-8). By allowing the individuals participating in these relationships to voice their own perspectives, justifications and stories, this research provides a space where academics,
development practitioners, educators and law makers can fully understand the realities of how teacher-student sexual relationships form and why they persist despite national laws prohibiting them.

**Research Methods**

The research for this work took place in several neighboring, rural, northwestern communities in Benin over the course of seven weeks from June until August 2009. Student, teacher and administrator participants were purposely sampled from a single shared secondary school location where I had previously taught English from September 2006 until June 2008 with the Peace Corps. My prolonged engagement as a teacher and member of the community where this research took place was an advantage in establishing trust and locating research participants. Selection began with student contacts I had had in class or interacted with in extracurricular activities (Girls Soccer Team, Environmental Club, English Club) and then a snowballing technique was used to encourage these students to invite their classmates and friends to discussion group sessions. For all potential student participants under the age of eighteen, I accompanied each interested student to their home in order to obtain parental permission. If only one parent was home I planned another time to return when I could speak to both parents. Due to my familiarity with the community and its relatively small size, this door to door approach was manageable and the most respectful way to approach parental consent. Logistically this was a time consuming process, as a visit to students’ homes inevitably involved cultural formalities (eating if it is meal time, drinking water, greetings) but it was necessary for cultural politeness and logistical purposes. Parents were also given the opportunity to participate, an invitation which was extended to the Parent Teacher
Association and other important community actors. This technique allowed for a diverse and willing group of participants from various grade levels, backgrounds, ages, and ethnic groups (Flick, 2009). Purposeful sampling permitted me to obtain the maximum amount of responses during my seven week field research. The school administration was notified and I led a brief faculty meeting to describe my research topic and invited those interested to participate. I continued interviewing each participant group (parents, teachers, students) until data saturation was reached and participant responses began to echo one another (Punch, 1998). Most interviews and focus groups took place at my neutral office space in a friend’s family compound near the school and times were arranged informally around market and agricultural schedules. I also made house visits for those who were more comfortable meeting in their homes. Additionally, I conducted one specialized interview with the NGO, Victory Way, at their headquarters, which were several hours away in the Northeast region of the country.

Originally, student participants were to be organized into discussion groups limited to five to seven students per group based on their comfort levels, while parents, teachers and administrators were to be interviewed on a one-on-one basis; however, I soon discovered that finding common meeting times was more complicated than I had initially presumed. Patton (2002) has argued that qualitative researchers must prepare for “emergent design flexibility” and that a study’s research design is often completed in the field, an observation which became the case for this research. Northern Benin has a semi-arid climate and the majority of my parent and student participants are agricultural workers by trade, farming a mixture of cotton and soy as cash crops and millet, sorghum, corn, yams and beans, for sustenance. Because I had arrived in the community at the end
of the school year, and during the commencement of the rainy season, many of my participants were occupied with clearing fields and planting crops. My interviews and discussion groups ended up being scheduled in response to the community’s agricultural needs and followed climate patterns. During lulls in between the clearing of fields, planting, weeding and fertilizing I arranged interviews quite literally according to the weather. In some instances interviews were cancelled because of intense periods of rain that would keep individuals indoors for several days on end. These torrential downpours would be followed by intense clean-up and repair days, to restore homes or fences that had fallen and crops that had been flooded. I found the best interview times to be right after planting or weeding periods and/or on Thursdays which is market day in the community. Thursdays are days when scores of individuals from surrounding rural areas come together to buy and sell goods and socialize with their neighbors. On these days I had non-stop visitors, from former students, parents and colleagues, who had heard I was in town, to new strangers who were curious and had seen me out in the fields. The only problem with this time and day was that interviews were often interrupted by new guests and many of the adults, from afternoon onwards, had consumed large amounts of tchoukatou or tchouk (local millet beer) and/or sodabe (local gin made from palm trees and cassava) and were incapable of conducting solid interviews. I spent a lot of time visiting, meeting, rescheduling and planning when interviews were to take place, which became a rather time consuming but socially important process.

Ultimately, I interviewed nineteen male students, fourteen female students, ten parents, six teachers, and two administrators in forty-five to one hour long interview or
focus group sessions. In order to facilitate discussion, student focus groups were separated according to gender due to the sensitivity of the research topic (Varjas, Nastasi, Berstein-Moore, & Jayasene, 2005). With parental permission, I spoke with three to five groups of two to three girls per group (ages 15 to 22) and three to five groups of boys in the same age range but typically in larger groups of four to seven per group. Participants in both groups were currently, or had been, students until at least the 6th grade. Each of the ten parent participants were interviewed on an individual basis until saturation was reached and interview responses began to echo one another. Unintentionally, but to my advantage, I ended up interviewing an interesting cross-section of parents, including two retired primary school headmasters, a high-up local politician, a dressmaker and several agriculturalists. Additionally, I conducted eight one-on-one semi-structured interviews with five teachers and two school administrators. These individuals represented both local and outsider perspectives, as there were teachers who originated from the community and those who had been transferred to the North from Southern Benin. At the time of each interview or focus group I recorded pseudonyms for each participant with names that reflected their religious affiliation along with their age (students only), sex, language/ethnic group, level in school (students only), and profession (parents only). This information was used during the analysis process to code, group and analyze responses across groups.

Because finding a subsequent meeting time that worked for all participants was problematic, directly after the group session I consolidated and reviewed the questions

---

14 See Appendix 5 for full list of research participant demographics
15 A level of analysis which proved insignificant for this study.
16 See Appendix 3
and responses and allowed participants to confirm, add or retract statements they had made in a member checking exercise (Creswell, 2008). Students were encouraged to approach me anytime following the group session before my departure date to add or expand upon any of the questions with ideas that came up after they had had more time to reflect on the issues that emerged on an individual basis. At the beginning of group sessions, I encouraged individual participants to respect one another, keep each other’s responses and reactions confidential and to meet with me outside of the group if they had information they were not comfortable sharing with the entire group present. All interviews were conducted in French and the language used locally in the community, and notes were taken by hand at the time of the interview.

By engaging all of the stakeholders I hoped to invoke a triangulation technique that would confirm general themes and fill in the gaps between nuanced experiences (Creswell, 2008). This technique allows researchers to compare and contrast various interviewee responses across participant groups and find levels of dissonance or harmony between various stakeholders’ perspectives (Creswell, 2008). In understanding how different groups perceive a phenomenon, the researcher is able to develop a more holistic view of the research topic, one that encapsulates a variety of views and perspectives (Creswell, 2008). This approach allowed me to fully explore the issue from various Beninois perspectives thus, generating a more holistic view and understanding of the phenomenon.

I found that beginning interview and focus group sessions with general questions about the informants’ lives, families, studies and other current and locally important

17 Because the language is specific to the region I am not disclosing it here for anonymity purposes.
topics was an effective way of putting the research participants at ease, making them comfortable and warming up for the interview session (Varey, 1997). I then guided my group sessions with broad, open-ended questions, and encouraged participants to talk about real situations and experiences in the third person, by using the pronouns he or she (Varjas, Nastasi, Berstein-Moore, & Jayasene, 2005). Because sexual harassment is not a well-constructed concept in Beninois society, I used questions inspired by Victory Way’s 2007-2008 survey as a guide to address the issues the term encompasses. Similar to the survey, I started with basic yes and no questions to generate consensus and solidarity amongst group members, which were then built upon throughout the group session. I avoided the use of argumentative questions and used body language and eye contact to encourage and relate to research informants and determine that the depth level of response had been reached (Wengraf, 2001). The basic questions asked in every group session were:

1. Do you accept/is it ok for teachers to engage in sexual relationships with students? Why or Why not?
2. Do sexual teacher-student relationships occur here? Have you ever heard of any situation where a student dated a teacher?
3. If it is wrong, why, do you believe, that teachers continue to engage in these types of relationships?
4. Why would a girl accept?
5. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages for each?
6. Have you ever heard of any situation where a student refused a teacher?
7. If a girl student refuses a teacher’s advances are there any consequences?
8. How do these types of relationships evolve; who typically initiates these sexual relationships, the teachers or the students?
9. Which types of teachers engage in these sexual relationships? Those who are native to this community or those who come from the outside/South? Are they typically married or single? Are they typically old or young?
10. Which types of girls engage in these sexual relationships? Are they rich or poor? Do they perform well in school? Are they hardworking or lazy?

---

18 See Appendix 2
11. How do parents typically react to teacher-student relationships?
12. (PARENTS ONLY) If you found out that your daughter was being pursued by one of her teachers what would you do?
13. Are there parents who encourage their daughters to “befriend” teachers?
14. If a parent, student, or teacher wants to report a teacher for pursuing one of his students where should they go? Who should they talk to?
15. Have you ever heard of a teacher going to jail or losing his job because of a sexual relationship (or attempted sexual relationship) with a student?
16. Is there a law against teacher-student relationships? Should there be?
17. What can we do on the level of the school administration or on the level of the national government to limit and eventually eradicate these types of relationships?

Students in groups were told that it was acceptable to agree or disagree with one another and all participants were encouraged to expand upon yes or no responses and use justifications to defend their position. The participants were told that their identities would be concealed and their responses would remain anonymous throughout the research process.

At the time of this research, because of rain shortages in the region during the previous harvest season, there was news of a clandestine famine across the North and the World Food Program was active in the community giving out large measures of fortified flour (mixed with oil, sugar, soy, and sardines)\(^{19}\) to families with children under the age of five. The distribution site for this project was at the community center across from the secondary school and in the same compound where I had planned to conduct my research. I saw it as a necessity to distance myself from this setting, because I did not want to be wrongly associated with the WFP project and therefore relocated to a friend’s one room traditional mud building which is typically rented to non-local students during the school

\(^{19}\) On an interesting note, people quickly became skeptical and distrustful with the food they were given as many of the children ended up having severe diarrhea after ingesting it. From my personal observations I would tie this to the fact that the children’s digestive systems were simply not used to or prepared for such rich food upgrades. On a contradictory note or perhaps in connection to the first, in several of the homes I stayed in or visited I was given the World Food Program flour to eat along with the other adults as the fortified flour was seen as a luxury item and not necessary for children.
year. Although this room was in a concession,\textsuperscript{20} because I had so many visitors on a daily basis throughout my stay, no attention was drawn to participants that differentiated them from other friends and guests. Furthermore, the family that I stayed with during my field research was a single-parent headed household with nine young children and a mother who spent the majority of her day working in the fields or selling fish at the local market. This meant that I was given a considerable amount of privacy throughout the day.

\textit{Reflexivity}

My positionality as a young, American woman, who served as a teacher for two years in the community in which I based my research, made me acutely aware of the local cultural norms and the nuances of local language and offered me an advantage regarding both trust and access to research participants. Similarly, in her own research, Varey (1997) found that her positionality as a female researcher was immensely advantageous when conducting interviews with female informants. Prior long-term experiences in the research community and constant communication with countless other volunteers and educators throughout Benin provided me with insider knowledge and understandings of on the ground realities in schools and relationships between teachers and students. My personal experiences, observations, and conversations have brought up issues which peaked my interest in a variety of areas and have irreversibly shaped the ways in which I examine and scrutinize existing literature and research on sexual harassment in Benin’s schools. My unique insider-outsider lens has enabled me to uncover various gaps and concerns with how the topic has been treated and represented to date, while my position as a familiar outsider became useful in generating candid

\textsuperscript{20} Family compound
responses from interviewees as there was limited concern that the information shared in interviews would reach the greater community and affect participants’ personal lives. Overall, these strengths gave me the opportunity to inquire more in depth and innovative questions, receive and record more locally and personally generated data and hopefully produce significant and representative findings and suggestions.

_Ethical Issues_

Ethical issues such as the permission to conduct interviews, the articulation of the objectives and limitations of the research, and permission to use interview data were carefully secured before the beginning of the data collection process, including full compliance with Ohio University Institutional Review Board’s rules and regulations.\(^{21}\) In order to respect the rights, needs, values, desires, and expectations of informants, I was explicit from the beginning about what the goals of my research were and what they were not (Creswell, 2008). I fully explained that I returned to the community for personal and educational reasons and to conduct academic research, and that I could not offer any legal, medical or counseling advice. I did however provide contact information to interested teachers, parents, or students for various local NGOs or government agencies that do provide legal, medical or counseling services to victims of sexual harassment along with a copy of the 2006 law. I emphasized that choosing not to participate in the research would not affect any educational or coaching opportunities or access to any additional resources to which the participants would otherwise be entitled to, and that choosing to participate will not bring any special treatment in teaching or coaching. I did not use participants’ names in any part of the research process, as the names of the participants

\(^{21}\) See Appendix 4
(teachers, parents, and students) are irrelevant to the overall goals of my research, which are to document the phenomenon in and of itself and how it is viewed by various community members, not to pinpoint a particular town, place, or experience (Flick, 2009). I protected my participants’ identities by using pseudonyms in all “verbatim transcriptions” of interviews and group discussions and engaged in “informant anonymity” to protect participants’ privacy (Creswell, 2008; Flick, 2009).

Because I did not want to legally bind any of my participants to their interview responses or implicate their participation in my research due to the sensitivity of the subject, I did not want to risk having a paper trail or the possibility of encountering a confiscation of my materials which would lead to revealing my informants’ participation in the research. Therefore, I obtained permission from each research participant via verbal consent, which I viewed as a more culturally appropriate form of binding social contract than written consent. Because many of my research participants were illiterate or did not have high command of the French language, I was uncomfortable asking them to sign something they could not read. I offered a copy of the consent form to all participants which included my contact information, and I clearly read all pertinent information, stopping frequently to clarify or explain as questions arose.

One potential risk for this research was the possibility that students or teachers would reveal intimate details about themselves or other students or teachers. To limit this risk I asked all interviewees to refrain from using names or recounting personal stories in the first person. Although this process was successful the majority of the time, as it is common to use the third person when recounting taboo personal events, certain individuals were implicated due to their title. I encouraged all participants to conceal the
identity of other members of research groups and their responses throughout the focus group sessions.

Additionally, my prolonged time as a member of the community in which I conducted this research created a personal dynamic to this study, as I maintain a variety of professional relationships and friendships within the community. For many of the student participants, I am their former English teacher and/or soccer coach. For the parents, I am their adolescents’ former English teacher and former community member or neighbor. And for the teachers and school administrators, I am their former colleague. There always exists an inherent tension when prolonged engagement is an element of the research process, as questions emerge as to whether the researcher can remain objective when conducting interviews with people she knows on a personal level (Punch, 1998; Stambach, 2000). However, the advantages of having lived and taught in the community allowed me access to individuals and more open conversations that no other outsider could ever have been offered in a short-term field study (Flick, 2009). Overall, I would argue these advantages far outweigh the potential limitations of prolonged engagement.

The experiences I have shared with the community, from weddings, funerals, and baptisms to personal conversations and moments of crisis, make me hyper-aware of and sensitive to the potential risks my research process may have on my participants’ lives. The level of trust I share and the friendships I maintain are based on my integrity as a researcher and my honesty as a human being. I have done and will continue to do everything in my capacity to protect the identities and emotional and physical wellbeing of this research’s participants.
Throughout the research process, I have been fully mindful of my positionality as a caucasian, American female, with a cultural bias against sexual harassment, particularly in a classroom setting. During interviews, I attempted to refrain from leading or judging participants and did all in my capabilities to foster an open environment in order to encourage free thought as not to influence responses by intimidation or shame (Punch, 1998; Stambach, 2000; Flick, 2009). I acknowledged that although our points of view might differ, I would remain cognizant and respectful of participants’ views and opinions. One feasible possibility was that participants may have positively viewed teacher-student relationships and would not agree with the law or its moral underpinnings. In this case, I neutrally defended the law to the degree that it is official Beninois policy that exists whether we agree with it or not. At the end of the interview process I often offered suggestions as to why the law was created but did not disclose my personal opinion about it, although I admit that this was likely apparent to those who knew me.

Another important issue to address is the element of power imbalance which occurs at any level of research and in the field of international development. These areas of cross-cultural work or exploration contain agendas which are oftentimes problematic, as the development industry by its very nature is “embedded with skewed power relations between the savior and the needy, poor, exploited, disadvantaged victim” (Agustin, 2007, p. 194). Agustin (2007) claims that, “organizations, agencies and projects which strive to ‘rescue’ girls and women are in fact disempowering them and denying their agency by continuing the maternalistic colonial mission to ‘save’ non-European, poorer women” (p. 70). Similarly, in her acclaimed book, Feminism Without Borders, Chandra Mohanty (2003) rightly questions Western feminisms representation of women of the “third world”
in comparison to their own self presentation. Western feminists privileged position in the first world automatically evokes a sense of *othering* that labels third world women as powerless victims controlled, exploited and harassed as a direct result of their dependency relationships based on racist, sexist and classist political, social, economic and educative institutions (Mohanty, 2003). In other words, “it is only insofar as ‘woman/women’ and ‘the East’ are defined as others, or as peripheral, that (Western) man/humanism can represent him/itself as the center. It is not the center that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the center” (p. 41-42). Echoing Mohanty (2003), Agustin (2007) views helping, salvation and benevolence discourses as a discursive way for the majority of aid and missionary workers and even researchers to “perpetuate the divide between the savior and victim… [while] maintain[ing] their more privileged status” (p. 194). For this reason, Mohanty (2003) urges researchers to engage in feminist scholarship which does not reinforce Western cultural imperialism or contribute to the ever-growing universal stereotyped image of third world women as a monolithic, ahistorical group of disadvantaged victims being always only acted upon.

Power dynamics are present and embedded on nearly all levels of human interaction and scholarship. Awareness of these power relations and efforts to limit or eliminate them needs to be an ongoing process in all fields and environments from academia, to within the family, in schools and at the work place. In order to limit issues of power, I was as honest and straight forward with research participants as possible. I clearly explained the purpose of my research and interest in the topic and was conscious that the language and terminology I used was as clear and understandable as possible.
Throughout interviews and focus groups I encouraged participants to interject at any time and I often repeated back what I had copied down to ensure accuracy, demonstrate that I was actually listening and to allow further clarifications in order to accurately record and represent participants’ views, opinions and statements.

Data Analysis

Based on my informants’ responses to research questions, I consolidated major themes and classified data categorically using data generated thematic codes. Coding involves the sorting, defining and giving of codes to the data on typically two levels, the first of which is more descriptive with less inferences and the second more interpretive and requires making inferences (Flick, 2009; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I took a volume of notes throughout my field research and kept a personal journal of first impressions, observations, and any major ideas or themes which emerged throughout the interviews. Data was coded throughout the fieldwork process so that coding and data collection often overlapped and happened simultaneously. This technique was useful in saving time and ensuring accuracy in data interpretations (Beebe, 2001). My final analysis and findings are the product of data collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group sessions, observations, and personal journal reflections and the major themes which emerged throughout these varying mediums. The goal has been to flesh out major categorizations or themes in perceptions, levels of acceptability or justifications for the existence of teacher-student sexual relationships, levels of awareness and ways forward to diminish or eradicate these interactions. I included the positionality (administrator, teacher, parent or student) of each participant-generated response and included the age (only for students) and sex for participant groups. The use of a Muslim or Christian name denotes the
religious persuasion of each respondent which is left somewhat ambiguous due to the fact that it was not a significant level of analysis for this study. I conclude my research with policy suggestions based on community identified needs and concerns.

Credibility Threats

As with all research, there are several plausible threats to the credibility of my research design. One of the most critical obstacles I may have faced is a cross-cultural construct validity threat. Sexual harassment has a unique history in the United States, which is culturally bound and has influenced (and perhaps limited) Americans’ understanding of acceptable and unacceptable male/female relationships in formal settings, where there is a difference of power between individuals. To combat this, when conducting interviews about “sexual harassment” I was as mindful of my own cultural baggage as possible and attempted to remain non-judgmental and open to the variety of responses that emerged (Punch, 1998; Stambach, 2000).

Another important limitation was that I was in an outsider position addressing sensitive/taboo topics (Cornwall & Welbourn, 2000; Flick, 2009). Teachers and administrators may have questioned my motives and limited their responses because of the sensitive nature of sexual harassment and the possible legal implications of their responses. Interviewing adolescents was also a difficult task as they may either have been hesitant to come forward with information out of fear or timidity or conversely they may have shared non-factual information to shock or surprise me (Flick, 2009). Discussing a taboo topic in general is difficult because sexual harassment and sexual relationships in general are not commonly or openly discussed topics in Benin and I was careful in
framing my questions in a way that could be accurately understood by interviewees with limited cultural misunderstandings (Cornwall & Welbourn, 2000; Flick, 2009).

Having been aware of these issues preceding my field research, I was hypersensitive to the possibility of these outcomes. However, throughout the research I was surprised by the candid level of responses from all parties. Only one student out of all research participants claimed no knowledge of sexual teacher-student relationships and the vast majority of participants appeared at ease throughout the research process.

Open-ended interviews are often not very structured by nature, thus they require much more preparation, discipline and creativity on the part of the researcher before and during the interview and more time for reflection afterwards (Wengraf, 2001). Because I chose not to record any of the research interviews, I was rapidly writing during the duration of each interview and focus group session, attempting to copy interviewee responses verbatim, in French. At times this became a difficult task because as group sessions became animated, interviewees talked rapidly and therefore body movements, expressions and tone were sometimes lost in translation. After each session I attempted to recreate and take notes on the emotion behind the responses and create context for what was said. Reflexivity is typically a major aspect of the researcher’s role in qualitative research and is “a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 64). With these points in mind, my use of a journal for personal reflections about experiences in the field and throughout the interview process became an essential aspect of the research process.
In addition to the previously mentioned “member checking” and “triangulation” techniques, I also used archival reviews based on Beninois sexual harassment law, published national statistics, NGO reports, and research findings prior to my research to compare, contrast, and enrich my findings. I used this already existing data to create context, establish precedent, and be aware of the trends and gaps in current academic research on the topic (Flick, 2009). Throughout the findings and analysis section I will provide “thick description” of the topic and verbatim interview excerpts to enable readers to relive my research and draw their own conclusions and interpretations of the study (Creswell, 2008). Throughout the research process I kept an active journal of first impressions, observations and my thought process throughout the field research (Flick, 2009). To promote credibility, I reviewed my work with fellow former Peace Corps Benin volunteers, in addition to at least one expert on education in Benin, to concur my findings in a “peer-debriefing” exercise (Creswell, 2009). This sort of crosschecking exercise allows for other individuals familiar with the region and topic to read-through preliminary findings and analyses to concur or challenge interpretations of participant generated data and conclusions (Creswell, 2008; Flick, 2009). It is typically a useful way to get second opinions and rethink original analyses or biases; questions posed about my thought-processes encouraged me to re-think through the framing of various aspects of my findings and was an effective way of reprocessing what I had learned (Creswell, 2008). The triangulation of methods has aided in validating my research and revealing areas of need for further research.
Chapter Three

Analysis and Findings

Public discourse, national law, and the majority of academic research on girls’ education has framed the issue of “sexual harassment” in the classroom as an abhorrent practice which can be eradicated only through tough legislation and increased enforcement against teacher perpetrators. In creating policy to protect female students, researchers, activists and lawmakers have made sweeping claims and generalizations about teacher-student sexual relationships, which were unsubstantiated and not reflected in my own research findings. Current laws and policies are revealed here as problematic, as “protecting” girls from teachers turns out to be much more complicated than condemning teacher “violators”. During my field work, I found that all parties (parents, teachers, administrators and students) were open to admitting that sexual relationships between teachers and students do occur, on a wide-scale; they did, however, have conflicting views as to who initiates these relationships and how they should be viewed.

Contemporary academic research on these types of relationships and interactions between adolescent girls and their peers and teachers are lacking and there exist contending points of view regarding who is responsible for initiating these relationships. A large part of this confusion is centered on conflicting views on female adolescent sexuality and agency, in addition to a lack of exploration and consideration of environmental factors, from poverty and a potentially problematic teacher-transfer policy to parental encouragement. The principal points of analysis of this work focuses on the

22 There was notably one female student participant who denied any knowledge of student-teacher relationships.
conflicting views surrounding responsibility for initiating these relationships among participant groups, how the participants of these relationships assess the risks and benefits of these interactions, how these relationships are perceived by community members and the underlying reasons and justifications behind the prevalence of teacher-student sexual relationships.

Throughout this research and across participant groups, sex between teachers and students emerged as a transactional process: a direct exchange of sex for money and gifts (with poverty or development disparities as a motivating factor) and/or grades (with corruption of the system as a major factor). Because the direct exchange of grades, money and/or gifts for sex appeared to be the primary motivating factor behind teacher-student sexual relationships, the overall primary justification for these relationships was more deeply rooted in poverty, lack of development, and limited vertical social mobility options than malicious criminal offenses or abnormal incidents of pedophilia.23 Understanding these relationships and interactions as oftentimes transactional and consensual versus harassing and coercive has the potential of shifting the discourse from focusing on females as helpless victims to females as agents or negotiators of their own sexuality. Although the practice of giving lower grades than deserved as a punishment for girls who refuse teachers’ advances is critical and must not be undermined here or elsewhere, many relationships in schools are in fact perceived as consensual, although deeply embedded in unequal power relations and/or poverty, and maintained through complex levels of silent or overt parental encouragement and societal acceptance.

23 Echoing the early arguments of Harne (2000) which emphasize that incidents of sexual harassment need to be viewed as endemic societal issues and not abnormal incidents.
The current discourse surrounding “sexual harassment” and its effects on girls’ education portrays girl students as victims of male-teacher predators (Harne, 2000). This oversimplification of actual relationships and interactions between males and females does a disservice to both sexes by confounding understanding of actual behaviors and interactions. As with any social phenomenon, each incident is distinct and complex and therefore must be reviewed on a case by case basis. Much like the research findings discussed in the literature review, in this study, all but one participant expressed direct knowledge of sexual relationships between individual teachers and students, but perhaps not surprisingly, no single group or individual claimed responsibility for initiating or encouraging these behaviors. A circle of finger pointing ensued as the majority of female students blamed teachers for pursuing and pressuring them into entering these relationships, while teachers and administrators claimed that female students sexually provoked educators by wearing makeup, pulling up their skirts, spreading their legs in class, or visiting teachers’ homes after school hours. Even though general perceptions of teachers who engage in sexual relationships with their students were negative in nature, teachers were continually portrayed more as victims of their own sexuality (men unable to control their “natural” urges, tempted by young harlots) than social deviants.

This analysis and findings chapter is divided into major themes which emerged throughout interviews and focus groups based on participant-generated responses which were found across all participant groups. The first section focuses on “Responsibility for Teacher-Student Sexual Relationships” and has been organized into varying categories including discussions on these prominent themes, Blame the Victim, Beauty Trends, Men will be Men, Parenting in this Mileu, and the Role of Male Students. The second section
examines the “Structural and Environmental Circumstances and Realities” that affect these relationships, such as Age and Consent, North/South Disparities, Teacher Transfers, and Reporting, Teachers as Ideal Partners, Poverty, and Coercion. The other major categorization is based on participants’ identification of some of the “Consequences” of these relationships, including the Corruption of Grades and the Undermining of Female Achievement. Finally there will be a brief examination of current community based “Reporting and Enforcement” practices which will lead into the discussion found in Chapter 4 which focuses on policy recommendations and solutions.

**Responsibility for Teacher-Student Sexual Relationships**

*Blame the Victim*

In the majority of interviews and/or focus groups with teachers, administrators, parents and students, the majority of the blame and responsibility for teacher-student sexual relationships was placed on female students, whereas men were nearly universally excused as, “naughty scoundrels” incapable of controlling their natural urges and therefore, not accountable to the ensuing consequences of their actions. Girl students were portrayed as devious instigators of these relationships, who essentially “asked for it” through their provocative hairstyles, behaviors and dress. Sédou24, a 16-year-old male student participant, elaborates on the issue of female provocation and intent contesting that,

> Sometimes girls lie to say they have to go to the bathroom just to walk in front of the teacher shaking their hips and taking their time. (Two other boys in the focus group at this point get up to demonstrate the walk and everyone laughs and agrees that this a fair representation.) They move in the same way that they would move

---

24 As mentioned in the methodology section all interviewee’s names have been changed to ensure their anonymity.
in bed. There are girls who even get mad if the teacher doesn’t notice her gestures and movements.

These accusations however, were not limited to teenage boys, as the vast majority of female student participants equally condemned their female classmates who had given into the pressures and rewards of dating a teacher. Salimatou, a 15-year-old female student, gives a scathing account of a fellow classmate who had accepted her teacher’s advances,

One girl became like his girlfriend and because of this every day in class it was like she didn’t care about anything. She did as she pleased all of the time. We all didn’t like the way she would sit in the class. She would often sit with her legs spread open or she would pull up her khaki uniform skirt so you could see her (points to thighs and crotch area) or she would put one of her feet up on the desk in front of her with her knees up in the air. And she would talk all the time in class with all of her friends disrupting and distracting the rest of us. She was absent all the time but was never punished. And if we took a test she would walk away a 17 or 18 (out of 20), but on the final she knew nothing and we all knew it.

In these and other accounts, there is an obvious emphasis on the sexualized nature of the female body. Additionally, a level of deceitful intent and provocation is placed on the female, which extends itself to the mentality that men are victims, being lured by their loins into making the dubious decision to date their students. This belief inevitably influences parents, teachers, and school administrators in creating policies to police girls more closely than their male counterparts via clothing, hair and make-up restrictions because of the possibility that these visual stimuli will tempt and provoke males.

Throughout the research process, numerous parent, teacher, and student (both male and female) participants, engaged in a “blame the victim” or provocation argument indicating that rules prohibiting girls from wearing make-up or braiding their hair would (and previously did) eliminate unwanted sexual attention and that girls are responsible for
eliminating this temptation. The policing of girls’ physical appearance, is certainly not unique to the region or even country where this research took place, however the institutional and local memory of very recent school policies restricting girl students from having long hair or wearing nail polish and make-up were very fresh in many of the research participants’ minds and were invoked repeatedly throughout focus groups and interviews. Although secondary school policies no longer officially place these restrictions on girls, many teachers and parents still insist that these modesty boundaries be respected by their daughters and female students and girls who stray from this conservative norm are judged as provocative instigators.

Locally held beliefs surrounding the female temptation and provocation perspective necessitate and reinforce cultural perceptions that adolescent female sexuality must be policed and repressed to both “protect” girls from any male who may be tempted by their appearance or behavior and to preemptively prevent males from being tempted. This mentality is represented by Henri, a 19-year-old male student, who offers a solution as to how to eliminate sexual relationships between teachers and students insisting that, “Girls have to limit their clothing styles which sometimes reach the parameters of indecent exposure…that would help diminish these behaviors.” This same idea was portrayed by another 18-year-old male student who stated that, “If makeup, jewelry, and hair braiding were forbidden in schools that would help the situation” (Parfait). Madame Sambieni, a parent and assistant director of a major national government-sponsored, social and health services organization in the community, blames the “looseness” and
“provocativeness” of contemporary school girls’ behaviors and dress on the rise\textsuperscript{25} of

teacher-student sexual relationships,

The girls put on their fake hair, red lipstick, makeup, short tight dresses that show off their behinds, and they sit with their legs open to show everything to the teacher. Afterwards he can no longer teach and it isn’t his fault. It is really the girls who are looking for the men. Really! With their hair down to their sides and artificial nails even, in schools! Now it is a lot worse than before, we didn’t do all of that before. One didn’t wear make-up or weaves to school. Those things are the problem.

Girls are portrayed here as devious young harlots, perhaps unaware of their own sexual prowess, but nevertheless charged, by society, with the moral responsibility to control not only their own sexuality but that of their peers, educators, and superiors.

\textit{Beauty Trends}

The idea that society pushes adolescent girls to focus on the development of romantic relationships, physical appearance and upkeep at the expense of their education is reinforced in Eishenhart and Holland’s (1992) study of women, achievement and college culture in the United States. Despite the different socio-economic contexts between the US and Benin, the idea that females (in Benin at a secondary level) are more preoccupied with investing in their physical attractiveness (social capital) than focusing on their studies, in attempt of securing a potential partner, is a valid possibility. In fact, in much of the “blame the girls” rhetoric, informants were fixated on holding the female students who wore make-up, painted their nails, or braided their hair the most responsible, claiming that they were on the prowl for sexual partners or potential mates.

The perceptions surrounding make-up, clothing and appearance are important to consider, for not only the messages and signals physical maintenance sends to the

\textsuperscript{25} Her perception is that there is an increase in teacher student sexual relationships taking place over time.
opposite sex, but also in considering the amount of time and energy girls put into improving their appearance and the lengths to which they may go to in order to keep up with fashion and beauty trends, including transactional sexual encounters. In a female student focus group one 15-year-old girl student emphasized the material advantages for female students who choose to engage in these relationships. She mentions a girl in her class who used to brag about her teacher-boyfriend, angrily emphasizing that,

She told us every time a holiday was coming up, that it was the professor who would buy her jewelry, shoes, the ones that cost 5,000 francs CFA [equivalency of $10.00]!!26 bracelets, necklaces, meters of fabric, and give her money to buy a weave to get braided into her hair. All of this to make her look like a “grande mademoiselle”27 (Salimatou).

An 18-year-old male, student informant, Henri, also emphasizes the idea of unnecessary luxury stating that, “Our girls are trying to follow the trends of beauty and elegance and finally they become lazy in the educative domain. And therefore, to pass into the subsequent grade levels they become dependent on using their teachers.” Madame Sambieni, a mother and assistant director of an important social and health services center, agrees that these asymmetrical sexual interactions take place as a result of poverty, but also attests that many poor girls simply want to fit in with their classmates and current beauty trends, “Girls will do it for money yes, but you know a girl will see that she can’t dress herself well compared to her friends and this motivates her.” A 15-year-old female participant explains how she and others “know” when a girl is “dating” an older and wealthier man, as she poses the question, “You see the girls here, you see how they dress really well right? And you see that their parents don’t have money? But if you ask them

---

26 This was emphasized as being very extravagant, expensive and excessive.
27 Stated with complete and utter disgust.
where these things come from they will refuse to tell you because they are ashamed to tell another person” (Saba). M. Bernard, a parent and high level politician in the community furthers this point, stating that, for the most part, “[Girls] just want to live outside of their financial means. [That is why] they have to run after a big man, one who has a monthly salary” which in rural areas often leads young girls to their teachers. The idea of obtaining a “sugar daddy” in order to secure the necessary means and access to luxury items and a more upper class lifestyle will be further explored below but is yet another essential aspect of understanding community perceptions of teacher-student relationships and motivations.

*Men will be Men*

Many of the passages depicted above are embedded with a seemingly widespread perception regarding male sexuality: that men are incapable of controlling themselves when in the midst of sexually attractive female students and cannot be blamed for their “natural urges”. The age-old “men will be men” argument was evoked time and time again to justify the behavior of male teachers. Henri explains further, “You know to me, a teacher is a person like everyone else, with the same needs as others, which sanctions a weakness in certain situations.” And in regards to a question demanding why teachers target female students as opposed to other women in the community, Henri continues his line of argumentation offering a proverbial response, “Is it not true that the goat grazes around the tree where he is attached?,” insinuating that it is only natural for a teacher to choose a partner from his immediate surroundings. In another interview, upon inquiring why male teachers pursue their students, despite knowing that it is against school regulations and Beninois law, M. Hounssou a non-local teacher critically insisted that,
Teachers do this because they are greedy, they want to eat everything like pigs and they think that it would be a loss for them not to take advantage of this golden opportunity. The girls are just like things just on the floor for them to pick from, just there for their pleasure. They pick and choose the beautiful ones for sex, just for that nothing serious. They know the girls have an inferiority complex and they can do as they please. They don’t want to waste the opportunity. They benefit from their position. That’s why when they see girls it is a loss for them not to take the sex.

Additionally, Monsieur Nouanti, a parent and chief executive of a major agricultural co-op in the community defends the “reasonable/excusable male” perspective as he explains, “You will see a girl who will seduce her teacher with her weave, braids, short, tight khaki uniform dress. They (male teachers) are men after all. Their (female students’) uniforms should go down to their ankles not just to their knees.” Furthermore, during a sexual harassment awareness-raising meeting with educators representing numerous secondary schools across the country, one female Gender and Development program administrator, who serves as the assistant director of an internationally renowned development organization, made a metaphor comparing girls in the classroom to, “forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden” (Maria). Throughout her talk she empathized with the male teachers acknowledging the strength it must take to restrain oneself from, “taking a bite of such plump, ripe fruit” (Maria). In these various commentaries, men are viewed as little more than sex-driven beasts, unable to control themselves and therefore not responsible for their sexual wanderings.

The contending rationalizations behind the acceptance that these relationships are morally wrong, dangerous, and primarily initiated by men, but that men must be excused for their actions due to the very nature and limitations of their “maleness”, were represented time and time again throughout my research and emerge as problematic for shaping ways forward. This conception of males as victims of provocation was extended
to a new level by teacher and student participants who indicated that although male
teachers more often than not did initiate these relationships; it was in a sense excusable
due to the hardship of being a single male and/or living alone. Male teachers,
administrators, and students claimed that it was more difficult for a man to control his
“natural” urges, while living away from his family and/or not having secured and regular
access to any form of sexual release than it was for females. Several research participants
indicated that my positionality as a female would prevent me from fully understanding or
sympathizing with this point. Furthermore, several non-local teachers made the argument
that it was a challenge for them to transition from busy city life to a rural environment,
where there was very little to do. One teacher originating from outside the community
explains with exasperation, “What do they expect men to do here? There is no cinema, no
dance club, no stadiums. There is nothing to do here for recreation outside of work,
except for sex,” (M. Gewanou). Another teacher from the South continued this argument
explaining that, “Most of the teachers who come from the South or Center of the country,
anyways far from here, they engage in these activities (sex with students) for many
causes. One they are alone here, their wives are left behind and it is a psychological need,
as the days go by they start to have a need to have sex and the girls are there, available”
(M. Hounsou). Rufine, a 19-year old female student restates the notion that sex is a direct
result of male “boredom” in rural areas, “The teachers do it to pass the time in this small
village.”

Other participants however, disagreed that these behaviors were specific to the
rural conditions of the community, Madame Sambieni emphasizes that, “Everywhere it is
really the same thing, pregnancies, abortions…men are men everywhere.” Saba, a 16-
year-old female participant reiterates the idea of universality, claiming that men on an international level are at the whim of their sexual urges. When asked what “type” of teacher engages in sexual relationships with his students she states, “Here it is truly everybody who does this. There is no single type. Even the president of France. M. Sarkosi has taken a young wife right? How can men here be any different? It is only the way in which they go about it which is different.” Despite the various claims that men cannot be expected to control their sexual urges, biological explanations for the prevalence of male to female sexual harassment have been problematized in the past due to their discursive nature which not only illegitimatizes female victimhood but excuses and victimizes male perpetrators, by turning men’s immoral actions into irrational impulses and incontrollable desires.

In addition to claims that men cannot restrain themselves, many claimed that it is often the girl students who chase after the male teachers28 for a variety of personal reasons. One 18-year-old male student, hoping to illuminate this point, questioned me asking, “You know, there are girls who pursue the teachers as well right? For example, there are girls who will go visit their teachers’ houses every night to greet them” (Parfait). Participants across groups claimed that there are a number of girl students, who often visit their teachers’ homes after hours, bringing them food or offering to help with cleaning or laundry in exchange for some extra money. However, many participants warned that these interactions quickly led to much more than that. Khadim, a 19-year-old male participant describes how these relationships are typically initiated,

28 As previously mentioned, all teachers interviewed were male as there were no female faculty in the secondary schools in the region where this study took place.
There are girls who even go to their teachers’ houses to provoke them. They get all dressed up and try to look pretty with make-up and pretty clothes. They are looking for easy points. There are girls who go out at night to bring their teachers food. They will then wait while their teachers are eating in order to bring home their bowls. Sometimes the teacher will insist that she stay and they will sleep together.

M. Hounssou, a non-local teacher, who has lived in the community for close to seven years, depicts his own experience with these kinds of interactions, he explains, “The girls here like to flirt with strangers/foreigners. It is a kind of easy game, to flirt.” M. Kounara, the most frequently cited casanova and self-acclaimed heartthrob of the secondary school asked me to emphasize the leadership role girls play in the initiation of these relationships in my research findings, he insisted,

You should write down that there are girls who provoke this also. There are all types of reasons these things happen: love, money, fear, maybe the girl just wants to be able to say that she is with a teacher. There are other students that will criticize her but others will be jealous.

M. Gewanou, a non-local teacher boasts, “Sometimes girls want me to pursue them or they pursue me in asking for better grades. They don’t do it openly. They stop by my house to laugh or talk with me.” M. N’Oueni, another local teacher, clarifies a different method by which girl students initiate relationships with their teachers, “A girl can give a signal on her exam paper, like draw a flower. This symbolizes that she wants the Monsieur.” Additionally, M. Zansou, an additional teacher from outside of the community explains, “Here it is the girls who seduce the teachers. It is the girl who is strong in taking the first step.” But it was not the teachers alone who made these seemingly self-serving claims, Alice, a 16-year-old female student, defends this position as well, admitting that, “Oftentimes it is the teacher who starts it, but there are plenty of girls even who are the ones who provoke the teacher. It is the poor girls who are proud of
that. They prepare food with their father’s money and bring it to the teacher at night.” Madame Sambieni, also warns that it is not only the men who should be blamed, “The girls have their part in it and the teachers have their part. You will see them making googley eyes at each other in the classroom and around town.” The general perception that girls are partially (or fully) to blame for initiating these relationships is a relevant issue which much be addressed when creating policy and reporting systems. Whether or not these views represent the reality of how these relationships develop, the widespread insistence that girls are the only or larger part of the problem must be countered or disproved in a way that shifts community perspectives of the issue. Without educators taking at least a portion of the responsibility for the initiation of these relationships only part of the actual situation is currently being addressed.

The disproportionate amount of claims condemning young girls for provoking sexual harassment because of their attention to physical appearance and fashion trends (essentially being adolescents) seemed suspicious considering the overwhelming counter-evidence that men initiate, pay for (through grades or money) and engage in these relationships and behaviors with multiple partners regardless of their own marital status, age, community of origin, religion, or ethnic background.29 One mother laughed as she described the vast array of “types” of men who engage in these relationships, “It is all of them, those who come from outside of this community along with those who come from here. The old ones and the young ones. Marriage doesn’t stop anything here though. They forget if they are married or not’” (Adama).

29 Research participants claimed that nearly all teachers regardless of these factors participated in sexual relationships with their students.
M. Hounssou stood out as one of the only teachers who acknowledged the potentially dangerous level of power teachers hold above their students and how this affects decision-making and consent. In making a point about what he views as a critical component of understanding who is at fault for the initiation of these behaviors, he states, “Teachers don’t realize… the place they have and the position of almost God that they possess in front of the girls.” Furthermore, given the fact that only one out of fifty participants denied any knowledge of teacher-student sexual relationships in the community and that nearly every participant claimed that these interactions were widespread, it becomes clear that the issue of teacher-student sex is important enough to be considered from any and all angles. Although clearly not every educator has participated in this phenomenon, the popular view that educators do or have in the past is an overwhelming testament to community perceptions of schools, teachers and female education.

*Parenting in “this Milieu”*

As menstruation marks the sexual maturity or debut of young girls into women, parents have expressed fear for their daughters in mixed-school settings believing that this environment could lead to immoral behavior, the worst case scenario being unplanned or early pregnancy, or the contraction of HIV/AIDS. Various studies on girls’ education have provided evidence that the reluctance of many parents (particularly those living a substantial distance from a secondary school) to send their daughters to school is grounded in the fear that their daughters are not properly supervised within the school setting and in-between the distances separating school and home (Emebet, 1998; Balde, 2004). In current research and within these research findings, parents are often in a lose-
lose situation whereby they are either demonized and accused of withholding their daughters from school and being overly cautious of the possible harms of formal education, or they are portrayed as uncaring, absent, or inadequate providers and not capable of “controlling” their daughters’ movements and activities outside of the home.

In this research, girls who became pregnant outside of marriage were portrayed primarily as anomalies or exceptions to the norm and the products of bad parenting. The fact that some parents are unable to provide for or control their daughters was extended to explain why some girls sleep with their teachers. Yao, a 16-year-old male student demonstrates this point as he states, “Here isn’t like Abhomey (large city in the South). The children aren’t well looked after by their parents here. This is what necessitates their vagabond lifestyle.” Jacques, another 17-year-old male student, concurs, “The girls here lack a lot of things and parents don’t have time to watch their children.” M. Yangi, a teacher from within the community, further describes the context behind the formation of sexual teacher-student relationships as he states, “We are in a milieu where there are girls who aren’t well cared for or taken care of by their parents. So they look to other men and their teachers to take advantage of that.” This justification of why female students engage in sexual relationships with their teachers also touches on issues of poverty, another major framing of how and why these relationships form.

The “this milieu” argument was often used to justify why things happen in this rural community specifically, but are not representative of the rest of the education system throughout Benin, particularly in the urban and/or Southern regions of the country. Rita, a local 16-year-old female student, who attends a private boarding school in a distant large city, explains some of the major differences she sees in the local
community’s mentality that lead to the prevalence of teacher-student relationships, “The people in the regional capital don’t let this (teachers sleeping with students) happen as much as here. That is why my mom sends us there. The girls there are more aware of their rights. They know a little more of the outside world.”

The notion that people within the community are simply unaware of their rights was a major issue that emerged across participant groups, particularly after questions regarding ways to limit or eliminate sexual teacher-student encounters. Scenarios in which community members are unaware of, cannot access, or are unable to read official laws and policies, due to either issues of literacy, access or awareness prove to be problematic as many participants, when asked to brainstorm initiatives to help limit these behaviors, mentioned that if a law was created to condemn these behaviors that would help. When informed that a law does in fact exist and provided with a copy and/or explanation of said law participants claimed that it was merely an issue of awareness and enforcement. A parent and local primary school headmaster, M. Raoul, also elaborated on the difficulties of enforcing sexual harassment law because of the reality of local conditions, he argued, “On the level of the parents there is the issue of illiteracy. Here more than 80% of the population is ignorant. It is necessary to explain to them that the sanctions exist. They don’t speak French. It is necessary that someone explains it to them in a language they understand.” Leticia, a 21-year-old female student, underlined this point, pointing out that, “The parents aren’t literate because they haven’t gone to school themselves so they don’t know how these things happen or what the real situation is.”

The fact that many parents have not attended school and therefore only know about the inner-classroom dynamics and power relations through others, dangerously increases
general suspicions of education as a whole. Understanding and addressing negative parental perceptions of schooling and the classroom environment needs to be a significant consideration when pushing for increased girls’ enrollment in secondary schools and/or increased enforcement of sexual harassment law. Without the support and involvement of parents it is difficult to envision any real change on the ground as parents were often contradictorily accused of either encouraging their daughters to date teachers or hiding their daughters at home from them.

Male Students as ‘Go-Betweens’

Another unanticipated issue which arose in this research and has not been addressed in other literature on sex between teachers and students, is the role of male students in the development of teacher-student sexual relationships. This discovery first came about when I asked Khadim, a 19 year old male student, to explain how a teacher would pursue a female student. He explained the typical process stating that,

Often the teachers make friends among the boy students and it is us (the boys) who hit on the girls for the teachers. And sometimes we bring the girls into their (the teachers’) bedrooms or a rented room and the teachers come to sleep with the girls there, especially if the teacher has a wife at home.

A non-local teacher also made direct remarks corroborating Khadim’s version of events, “Normally it is not the teacher who directly courts the girls it is the job of the ‘go-betweens’. They are boy students who are ‘go betweens’ for the teacher and the girl” (M. Hounssou). When questioned what male students get out of this intermediary role Khadim simply states that, “It is about friendship and usually they (the teachers) help the student pass into the next grade level.” M. Hounssou elaborates this point and delves into his personal experiences stating that,
They (the boys) get good grades for their “go-between” jobs but they don’t end well because they aren’t hard workers. They serve as “go-betweens” just to get good notes but they can’t go far because they stop at the exams, they can’t pass because they never worked for their grades. When I had my first teaching post, when I was younger I did this. The go-between brought me a girl. I didn’t even know her or ask for her it was their plan to get grades and so I wasn’t severe with them. He brought the girl and left the girl at my house with me and she went right to the bed to sit down and everything happened (M. Hounssou).

Male students are also victimized, used and exploited during the formation and process of transactional sexual relationships between male teachers and female students. Their inferior status due to their younger age and inferior economic standing puts them at a disadvantage when pursing relationships with females their own age and places them below their teachers in age and economic hierarchies. Although transactional sexual relationships between teachers and female students appear to be lubricated and facilitated by additional transactions between teachers and male student intermediaries posing as “go-betweens” for their teachers and perspective female student partners, these boys and young men are also manipulated. This additional element, in understanding how these relationships form, is essential in that it demonstrates that these teacher-student sexual relationships are multidimensional and that there are various other actors (male students and parents) under the surface at play. Just blaming girls or teachers does not address the full scope of the problem as there are extensive structural elements grounded in economic and power inequalities which need to be taken into consideration. The next several sections delve into structural and environmental factors which contribute to an atmosphere that condones, tolerates and even supports transactional sexual relationships between teachers and students.
Structural and Environmental Circumstances and Realities

Age and Consent

As previously explored elsewhere in this work, the ambiguities and haziness encountered when conducting cross-cultural research, which delves into issues and understandings of culturally constructed conceptualizations of the age of consent, is a complicated and sensitive matter. Societal perceptions of age, maturity, and consent have created invisible barriers which somewhat arbitrarily create or deny individuals the right to make their own decisions regarding their sexual lives. Although typically referenced to “protect” individuals who are not “mature” enough either physically or emotionally (or a combination of the two) to make informed decisions about their sexual lives, the official age of consent and laws protecting female students were contested by a variety of interviewees because of their incompatibility with on-the-ground realities, including local perceptions of age of consent. Although the official age of consent in Benin is 15-years-old, any sexual activity between any female student (regardless of age) and educator is prohibited by the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law because it poses as a conflict of interest and potential point of corruption of grades (Sexual Harassment Policy, 2006). Despite the fact that national law protects all students regardless of age, this point was not brought up in any interviews. Additionally, many teachers and administrators emphasized a counterpoint which they felt was underrepresented in the typical discourse surrounding sexual harassment in schools, which pertains to their perception that the wide range of ages among students in rural classrooms blurs the moral lines which are typically much clearer in “normal” or average classroom settings.
When interviewed about some of the Troubling Preliminary Findings of Victory Way’s 2007 Sexual Harassment Survey, one high-level school administrator pointed out that school “girls”, in much of rural Benin, are in fact full-grown young women, sexually mature and able to make their own decisions (M. Nago). Although he acknowledged that educators should avoid relationships with students because of obvious objectivity and power dynamic conflicts, he wanted me to emphasize in my “final report” that school “girls” in this community are sometimes 19 to 30-years-old. In reference to teacher-student relationships, he reiterates,

It happens because the school girls are older here than where you come from. In 4ème (equivalent to 8th grade) you find girl students who are already 20-years-old! They are behind in their studies and they are grown girls in low-level classes. 25-years-old in 2nde, 1ere, and Terminal (equivalent to 10th, 11th and 12th grade). These are ripe/mature girls. This is the mix that has contaminated the classroom (M. Nago).

This wide range of ages within a classroom, he explains, is due to the fact that girls often start school late because of resource/financial problems at home or because of the intricacies of the French education system, which make repeating grade-levels multiple times more common place than in the United States. This systemic problem was attributed to the various exams between major grade levels, which hold students back for possibly years at a time. Furthermore, it appeared as though, the general perception or official position of the school administration was first that female students seduce the male teachers and second that those participating in these relationships are of age and that

---

30 In an analysis of educational attainment in sub-Saharan Africa Stromquist (1998) observed that 16 percent of students who enter primary schools were likely to repeat a grade and of the children who entered primary school nor more than 61 percent are estimated to reach even the final level of primary school (5th grade); figures which support the idea that sub-Saharan African governments continue to fail to address the issues of dropout or abandonment and repetition of grade levels according to ethnic, regional and gender perspectives.
consent is mutual. Therefore, possible solutions were only really on the level of punishing girls and policing their appearances and bodies. An additional disturbing idea which emerged was the questioning of girl students credibility as school administrators demonstrated the perception that there were always doubts that the whole truth was being told by girls who had come forward with claims of harassment or coercion. This is obviously a problematic assumption which will be explored in the following and concluding section of this chapter.

Another issue embedded in this school administrator’s remark is the socially accepted norm for the age of sexual debut in the region. Student participants and parents frequently cited 14 to 19-years-old as the acceptable age for marriage (implying sexual debut), most indicating that a girl’s physical maturity was a direct indicator of her sexual and mental maturity. When asked about the acceptable age of marriage for females in the community, Adama, a mother of fourteen and agriculturist, asked for a clarification, “Students or girls who don’t go to school?” she asked. “Both,” I said. “Well, 14 or 15 for girls that don’t go to school and 16 to 18 for students,” she replied. It was unclear whether Adama’s hesitation and differing standards for marriage were based on the perception that a girl should be able to complete school before marriage, with the underlying notion that marriage would be a hindrance to education, or that student-status makes a girl perceived as less mature and ready for marriage. One 15-year-old male student commented on this issue under the pretext of parental reactions to student-teacher sexual relationships, stating that, “Here, at the age of 14 or 15, a girl is considered an adult if she has matured physically and she takes care of herself. She can accept gifts and act as she pleases” (Benoit). Both of these community-based perceptions of age of
consent norms within the community surface as problematic when establishing and enforcing policy regarding teacher-student sexual relationships as they challenge pre-existing, top-down policies that frame age and consent differently.

North/South Disparities, Teacher Transfers and Reporting

A further issue, which emerges as critical in understanding why and how these relationships develop, draws from the negative effects of North/South teacher transfer practices and urban/rural development disparities. Oftentimes, in northern Benin there is an observable and distinct disconnect between civil servants (health workers, educators, governmental administrators, military officials, public welfare and service people) and the local population. This is due to the disproportionate number of government employees who are native to the Southern part of the country but working in the North. It is common practice in Benin for individuals from the more developed, South to be transferred or relocated to Northern regions to “do their time” assisting in Northern development. All branches of the civil service have strict policies on the time one must serve in Northern or rural regions, oftentimes, inadvertently reinforcing feelings of superiority and animosity on behalf of those required to work and live in rural, “backwards” communities. One Southern teacher explains the gap in communication and understanding, emphasizing some cultural differences he places at the root of North/South tensions,

There is an aloofness/distance/reserve between communities sometimes… They [people from the North] don’t like us but they like our money. One of the many reasons they put forward is that in the South if we die we can be buried in a house [courtyard]. But here they are so afraid of death they park dead people far away in a cemetery. Right away they remove corpses from houses because they are afraid his ghost will cause trouble. So if the girls marry people from the South she will
be buried in a house and not in a churchyard far away. People in the North are so savage and violent (M. Hounssou).

This comment surfaces as one among many examples of cultural differences and discords in North/South relations, but even here money and “development” are at the root of these animosities as both the monetary advantage Southerners enjoy and the “savageness” of Northerners are referenced.

The disconnect between civil servant transferees and locals is exacerbated by the fact that much of the rural, Northern, adult population works in the agricultural sector and has not had access to formal education, making communication in Benin’s lingua franca, French, difficult and intimidating. This is intensified by the fact that those from the South are from different linguistic/ethnic groups than those in the North leaving no other form of communication available (outside of French). When asked how they would respond to an incident or relationship they were opposed to, several parents expressed feelings of intimidation, indicating that they would be uncomfortable approaching the school administration directly because of a lack of command of the French language. When asked why teachers date their students as opposed to other local women, Saba, a 15-year-old female student explains, “You will hear the teachers say that they cannot date a villager, an illiterate, and that is why they date their students.” The idea that local women were unapproachable due to language or socio-economic barriers is another important element in the North/South divide.

Inequitable development in the North and South is compounded by rural versus urban poverty and creates fissures between parents and teachers, thus making confrontation or reporting complex. Throughout this research people from rural
communities were represented, sometimes by themselves and often labeled by others, as unknown of their rights and unable to seek justice in the midst of corrupt reporting systems. Khadim, a 19-year-old male student, defends this position, along with the previously mentioned notion that poor parents are unable to properly supervise their children, as he states, “The daughters of the civil servants are luckier because their parents monitor them more closely. They have the protection of their parents and of money.” M. Yangi, a local teacher explains the differing responses between parents who are native to the community and those from the outside (often civil servants temporarily living in the area because of a transfer), “If they are true villagers, country people, then they will accept these [teacher-student] relationships in spite of themselves. They don’t know how to react but they want to. But if the parents are civil servants or intellectuals they will carry a complaint to the gendarmerie.” M. Kounara, a local teacher, explains that punishments and sanctions only exist in larger/more urban areas, “In bigger cities where people are more aware of their rights and the functioning of government they can bring the teacher to jail or to trial.” When explaining the varying consequences for teachers who sleep with their students, M. Hég, a parent and retired primary school director furthers this point explaining that, “In the South they (teachers) are fired but here only certain people will actually lose their jobs.” Jean, a 17-year old male student, agrees, “The problem is that there is no reporting system. We must develop a system here where we can come forward and complain. We can’t go all the way to the regional capital if we have a problem. We have to educate the parents about the system as well.” Kanditcha, another 17-year-old male student, outlines the major issues he sees with reporting sexual harassment within the community,
It is necessary that the parents are wealthy in order to do anything if they disagree with a teacher’s behavior, because we are far from the capital here. If you are closer to the capital there are places you can go to file an official complaint or press charges. But here we only have the gendarmerie31, who do nothing. Here you will only find corruption on every level. If there is a problem it is the friends of the teachers who will come forward to take care of it, oftentimes with money. The administration doesn’t function properly because they are also implicated in these behaviors so they will take any report lightly.

M. Hounssou, also describes the problematic double standards in reporting and justice between the rural poor and urban elite when he states,

Being able to report is a luxury and local girls often don’t have a support network...If you do something like that in the South with some intellectuals’ children, Yayi Boni’s daughter, Ministers’ children, lawyers’ children, you will have problems. But in the villages (phuuuh) nobody cares, it just continues to happen. The laws are not objective.

When dealing with the justice system, wealth and status appear to be directly associated with the outcomes, consequences and level of seriousness with which complaints are considered by local authorities.

*Teachers as Ideal Partners: Contentions between Locals and Outsiders*

Teachers in rural areas are members of the top echelon of local society, both because of their status as educated and their monthly government salaries. Through observation and conversation, research participants indicated a popular perception of young and “single” teachers as high-ranking, potential bachelors because of their position among the top income earners in the community. The use of the term “single” becomes somewhat arbitrary as non-local, transfer teachers even if married, often leave their families behind and stay from two to five years in the community alone, while their families await their return. This phenomenon leaves non-local educators isolated, lonely.

31 French for military police.
and unaccountable for their actions, due to the geographical distance between them and their social networks and families. Student participants appeared to perceive non-local teachers as wealthier, more exotic and therefore, more desirable partners because of the possibility of relocation to the South and an improvement of social status. Henri, an 18-year-old student, touches on this perception as states that, “In this village, it is the teachers who come from the outside who have the chance to date girls from my locality because the girls say that they are more capable to take care of their needs.” Florentine, a 16-year-old female student, agrees as she describes the problems which have emerged as non-local teachers take eligible young girls from the community, “Today poor farmers can’t even find women to marry because of teachers or others who are a little rich. They come to the girls’ houses and ruin the poor guys’ possibility. They come to speak to the girls’ parents and say, ‘Look what I can bring to you daughter. She can’t even find anything to eat here.’” These responses demonstrate first the degree to which outsider teachers are identified as primary targets, due to economic status, for girls and their families in rural communities and second the facility in which they can instigate these relationships due to socio-economic inequalities between teachers and low-income families.

Many participants acknowledged poverty as a motivating factor behind the acceptance of teacher-student relationships and included insights to the fact that they oftentimes do not end well despite initial expectations on behalf of the students. One parent, M. Koyiri, states that generally,

They (the girls) accept little gifts that he (the teacher) gives them because the parents can’t give them everything they want. This is poverty. You see, girls from the bigger cities don’t accept. They understand life. But those from the
countryside accept. They are fooled. They think that the teacher is going to help them and bring them outside of the rural area.

Furthermore, in numerous interviews when asked how these relationships conclude many participants cited one case in which a teacher from the South married and brought a local girl to a larger Southern city to start a family. “He suddenly divorced his wife for a student, a local girl who caught his eye. It was like a lottery for the local girl. He paid for all her school and gave her a lot of money and brought her to the South to meet his family” (Hounssou). Students and parents repeatedly used this story as a proud demonstration that sometimes these encounters end well, with not only a marriage but a successful new life outside of the rural locality. The subtext of most stories about marriages however, was the fact that they were nearly always directly linked to unplanned pregnancy as opposed to romantic stories of love and commitment.

Another interesting point of analysis which emerged was that community and family-based responses to pregnancy demonstrated a degree of differential consequence depending on the local versus non-local status of the fathering-teacher in question. Various participants explained that local teachers were more likely to be pressured into marrying a pregnant student, whereas outsider-teachers were liable to flee to another post, abandoning the student and child, leaving the student’s family financially responsible for the pregnancy. Pregnancy was a commonly mentioned precursor for marriage, but the idea of having a sexual relationship and abandoning the pregnant student afterwards was

32 Notably perhaps is the fact that only three participants mentioned love as a possible reason for having sex with a teacher, and one male parent interviewee expressed frustration, anger and disappointment that his daughter had been sexually active with a teacher for love alone and had not received any material payment for her “services”.
an equally feared possibility (by parents and girls). When asked which “type” of teacher more often pursues his students, Rufine, a 19-year-old female student, stated, “I think it is the teachers that come from the outside that do it the most. But after they do it it’s over. They can leave.” Khadim, a 19-year-old male student, pushes this idea a step further as he explains,

Those who have been sent here from the outside, mostly the South, do it [have sex with their students] the most and afterwards they abandon the girls. Those who are locals in this community often take the girls as their wives afterwards. For example, we have three local English teachers here who pursued their students and the girls got pregnant. Afterwards they all married the girls.

Khadim’s example was one I was familiar with as not only were these three English teachers my former colleagues, but they were additionally the husbands of two of my former 7th and 8th grade female students. These couples, among others, were often mentioned as examples of unplanned pregnancy directly resulting from a situation in which local teachers were obliged to negotiate with students' parents and follow community norms, resulting in their subsequent marriages.

From various case by case descriptions, local teachers appeared to be held accountable for their actions based on the proximity of their family and social networks, in contrast to outsider teachers who were able to disappear without serious repercussions. When asked about the “type” of teacher who engages in sexual relationships with his students, M. N’Oueni, a local teacher, insisted that, “It (a teacher-student relationship) is more dangerous if they (the teacher) come from the South because they can escape responsibility for their actions… If the girl gets pregnant, his (the teacher’s) parents are not here to arrange a marriage.” When asked the same question, M. Nagassi another local teacher confirms this scenario stating, “The teachers that come from outside of the
community are the worse. They can leave. They think like, I don’t care, I am not from here. But if it were me I would have problems with the parents. But them, they can flee if they have to.” M. Hounssou, a non-local teacher from the South, offers a similar explanation demonstrating the differential treatment of local and nonlocal teachers, “A foreigner (outsider teacher) can easily deceive the girl because his family history is not here. Local men can’t offer the same level of promises and material things as an outsider can” (M. Hounssou). These findings and perceptions are significant considering that a large number of teachers at the secondary school level come from outside the local community. If these perceptions are established as founded in reality, the teacher transfer process poses a serious threat to female students who become sexually active and/or pregnant with an individual who has no socially imposed obligations to care for them or their child after the fact.

Other disturbing elements of teacher-transfer programs and policies were outlined by M. Hounssou, who describes how an additional and perhaps even more dangerous situation recently came about when the national government enacted a program where young military men were sent out into rural Northern areas as teachers to aid in the national teacher shortage.

It is worse for them (military teachers) because they are only here for one year so they run around as they like. They are not well paid because it isn’t their trade and they received no teacher training…but they are given a small salary to survive. They are happy because the alternative is doing nothing …Some have impregnated girls, making babies everywhere.
Several student participants explicitly cited two military teachers\textsuperscript{33} who they perceived as directly responsible for their sisters’ and friends’ abandonment of school due to unplanned pregnancy. Florentine, a 16-year-old female student laments, “It is because of him that our sister has abandoned her studies. My parents thought about bringing him to prison and telling the gendarmerie but he had already left for vacation…and you know he was only posted here for one year so he will not come back.” Additionally, a retired female teacher and parent from the South recounted a similar experience she encountered when she first began teaching. She explained that after normal school training, teachers were required to go student teach for one month far away, \textit{en brousse}\textsuperscript{34} (Grace). Laughing while she continued, she explained that, “The pregnancy rates in those rural communities, in just that one month time would soar due to this influx of young men, new to this recently acquired position of power” (Grace). The implication that economic disparities matched with asymmetrical power relations and the lack of feasible developmental opportunities for young women are at the root of understanding the formation of teacher-student sexual relationships makes these findings extremely significant. The effect is twofold, not only because teachers are perceived as capable of creating good opportunities for local girls or wealthy providers but also because the act of pursuing one’s students outside of social network accountability facilitates sexual encounters and creates the opportunity to escape responsibility for one’s actions.

Understanding the dynamics and perceptions of the formation of these relationships from

\textsuperscript{33} Both of these individuals taught at the same time as myself in the secondary school where this research occurred.

\textsuperscript{34} In the bush, in rural areas.
all perspectives becomes critical as these elements create incentives for students and parents to accept these relationships and for teachers, parents and students to initiate them.

**Poverty as a Primary Motivator**

Across participant groups, sex between teachers and students was predominantly portrayed as a transactional process: a direct exchange of sex for money and gifts and/or grades. Therefore, these relationships surface as being deeply grounded in poverty, lack of development, and limited vertical social mobility options for young girls and women. Understanding these relationships and interactions as transactional is important in identifying ways forward to address and eradicate these behaviors. National government and international development-driven education and gender policies need to more closely examine the unequal power relationships within schools, between teachers and their students, and outside of schools within rural communities. If the primary cause behind these relationships is poverty-induced, and maintained through complex levels of silent or overt parental encouragement and societal acceptance, than the strategy for reporting policies, law enforcement, and sanctions needs to shift in order to more adequately address the complexities of these realities.

**Parental Consent**

As examined earlier, current research has largely neglected to explore why teachers are perceived as “ideal” partners for girls and women in rural communities. Through interviews, personal discussions and focus groups, it became apparent that single men with disposable incomes were targeted by female students and sometimes their families as potential marriage (or sexual) partners. The issue of poverty emerges as critical, both in explaining why low-income families appear to be more likely to accept
these behaviors and why they are less likely to report teachers to the higher authorities. The complexities of parental complacency came up time and time again, and the expressed perceptions among research participants suggested that low-income families were more likely to accept teachers’ advances towards their daughters because of a combination of the monetary benefits these relationships would have on the family and a loss of negotiating power within the family, due to the fact that parents were unable to provide for their daughters’ needs.

One systemic issue which facilitates teacher-student relationships and sexual encounters in general is the fact that many students commute to school from smaller, more rural locations and oftentimes stay together in large groups either renting rooms, staying in Catholic dormitories with local nuns, or living with and working for extended family. When addressing this very issue, M. Hounssou describes the difficulties many rural students face in funding their education and daily needs while living away from home, “Teachers don’t earn much, but for the rural girls it is a lot of money. There are even small girls who find someone to finance them… They are like refugees who need to make a life here somehow… Those girls from small villages don’t stay even one year before having their own permanent ‘friend.’” Many students repeated similar stories stating that once monthly provisions brought from home run out they are left to fend for themselves in order to make ends meet until their parents bring them food supplies or they have an opportunity to travel home for corn flour, oil, and other cooking needs. Poverty and necessity emerge as significant contributors to students seeking assistance from their teachers.
When questioned about the “type” of girls who accept their teachers’ advances, nearly all research participants from every category made a distinction between rich and poor students, emphasizing that poorer students and their parents were more likely to accept their teachers’ advances in exchange for very basic, everyday items. M. Zansou, a non-local teacher, cites the rural environment as the primary reason for the prevalence of these relationships, “There are material conditions which encourage this. The girls have problems finding the means to survive. It is relative poverty.” Pascaline, a 15-year-old female student, further illustrates this point as she states, “There are girls who accept because they are looking for extra points on their assignments and grades and there are others who are looking for money but it is only a little bit of money. So rich girls don’t ever accept.” Ibrahim, an 18-year-old male student, also places poverty at the core of these sexual exchanges, “The girls mostly accept here especially, as a result of poverty. If a girl can find even a little bit of money she will easily accept. It is the money they are after here. That’s what interests/motivates them.” When asked how teacher-student sexual relationships evolve one 19-year-old, male student described the role of parents and male students in the development of these relationships,

Typically, it all begins with poverty. The girl goes to the teacher’s house for money, for small things like breakfast, charcoal for cooking, soap for washing herself and her clothes, school fees, and school supplies for the academic year. After that, if there is a problem with money at her house/within her family the teacher will help take care of these financial problems. In the end, the family is happy with the teacher and wants their daughter to marry him either that or they will say nothing to their daughter about sleeping with him because it is like he has lessened their financial burden or maybe even they receive money directly from the teacher for their silence. Sometimes parents even provoke their daughters, encouraging them to date their teachers and say, “Look he has money he can help you even if you have nothing he can support you, you should accept his advance,” and the girl becomes discouraged. Sometimes the boy student will involve himself here and talk to the parents of the girl. He tells them all of the teacher’s
capabilities and capacities for supporting the girl. And together they talk to the
girl to push her and convince her. Oftentimes, even if the girl is as young as 12
years old the parents will agree and accept. They are happy even (Khadim).

Another 16-year-old male student echoes this idea but adds a “don’t ask, don’t tell”
element to the understanding of how parents respond to the knowledge that their
daughters are finding financial support outside of the home. He states that,

Parents are happy when their daughters bring things home. They don’t ask where
they come from. They don’t mention that they did not give their daughters money
to buy those things. You see, here being a teacher is at least something. It is
because here, our parents do not have money. They want money and it is for that
reason that they allow their daughters to be with teachers. If someone is interested
in their daughter, the parents will say give me some money and take her. If they
are already rich they will bring the teacher to prison for these types of things, but
if they are poor they will let it go for money (Lamine).

This “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy was reiterated by Leticia, a 21-year-old female student
who stated that, “The parents know that they cannot buy certain things for their daughters
and that their daughters need them and so they prefer not to know how their daughters get
them.” A more drastic viewpoint is raised by a 16-year-old male student who explains
that, “There are also parents who like for their daughters to get pregnant. They often say
that they cannot pay for things like school fees for the girl so they let her do as she
pleases, so long as the teacher pays for her needs” (Sédou). The implication that parental
complacency and/or even parental encouragement and support were common elements in
the development of these relationships, because of the transactional nature of the
relationships, was a major theme throughout interviews and focus groups, although the
approach to explaining this issue varied from group to group.

Many participants also mentioned that if a teacher was sincere and unmarried,
then it would be acceptable for him to find a wife among his students. Several outsider
teachers demonstrated this position stating that they also knew of parents who encouraged their children to be with teachers, “So long as the teacher is from the community and sincere” (M. Hounssou). This insider versus outsider element in parental approval or disapproval of these relationships was additionally reflected in another non-local teacher’s response, as he states that, “If the teacher is local, girls might be encouraged because he has already succeeded in life. They (parents) might even push their daughter towards him” (M. Zansou). These positions demonstrate a degree of differential treatment, which echoes the previous discussion surrounding the differing consequences of pregnancy depending on the teacher’s insider/outsider status.

Despite the claims that parents are open to accepting teacher-student relationships, for the most part, students and teachers alike viewed the vast majority of parental encouragement as a necessary evil or a means to an end when providing for a family with limited resources. M. Nagassi, a local teacher, warns that, “[Although] there are certain parents who encourage it (teacher-student relationships), those who have the means do not tolerate or accept it at all,” indicating that acceptance is contingent upon an absolute necessity of financial resources. This idea is continued by Rufine, a 19-year old female student, who explains that, “The parents who aren’t capable of financing their daughters’ education ‘accept’ out of need, not want.” This line of dialogue typically led to a discussion around parental power and control in the family.

One of the most disturbing and damaging effects of teacher-student relationships on the family occurs when parents lose negotiating power in front of their children, as they are unable to provide for their needs. In these circumstances parents are obliged to accept relationships they do not necessary agree with in order to fund their daughters’
education. Kassa, a 17-year-old male student, outlines this idea as he admits that in most circumstances,

Parents let their children go. If a girl is with a teacher it is already a good thing. She will bring money to the house and they are happy. She has found a “grand” (big man). It is the teacher who pays for her school fees and so the parents let it go to the point that they no longer have any authority to condemn the teacher. They have accepted the relationship out of need and have lost all authority with their daughter.

M. Raoul, a parent and primary school headmaster, explains, “Taking care of/raising a girl is complicated and difficult. When parents don’t have the means to support a girl they become weak in front of her. They encourage their daughter to search for herself” and then cannot control the consequences in the aftermath of their decision. The implication that parents accept these behaviors for financial reasons came mainly from male and female students and was strongly opposed by the majority of parent interviewees who contested that no parent would ever want or allow a teacher to date his/her daughter. Yet one parent, Madame Sambieni, the aforementioned assistant director of a large social and health services center in the community, describes the rationale behind some parents’ acceptance of these relationships, “Some [parents] think that if they follow this civil servant he is going to support them. Parents don’t understand that at the core of it, it is only sex that he wants.” Additionally, Adama, a single mother of fourteen and agriculturalist, also sees that some parents are fooled by pipe-dreams of a better life as she points out that,

Some [parents] are happy because they don’t have the means to take care of [their daughter] and because if the girl gets pregnant she will marry a richer worker not just another farmer like them. They aren’t bothered by it. They imagine that afterwards they, themselves, will no longer have to go out in the fields every month and work hard with their hands.
She went on to somewhat hesitantly admit that she also would be willing to negotiate with a teacher who came to her with the intention of marrying her daughter, so long as he promised to financially support her daughter and pay for her school fees. “If your own daughter didn’t have the means and the teacher was going to help her you would be obligated to accept it and get along with the teacher so that he helps your daughter,” she explains. Madame Gnammi, a dressmaker and single mother who has chosen to send her daughters to a private school outside of the community, explains why parents often are forced to accept in spite of themselves, “If the parent can’t pay his daughter’s school fees and the girl is just fending for herself he (the father) can’t do anything. He will just accept it because he can’t give his daughter the necessities.” Yet, when asked what she would do if a teacher was pursuing her daughter, Madame Gnammi stated,

> For me, if a teacher was after my daughter I would refuse. Even if I had to go all over town begging for money I would prefer that over putting my daughter in a position where she had to use her body. If he really loved her he could wait until she finished her studies first and became someone herself.

Parental acceptance of teacher-student relationships in rural, northwestern Benin has little to do with cultural differences in perception that these relationships are wrong, problematic and undesired. Instead, parents who permit, allow, accept or encourage their daughters to pursue teachers are compelled by dire situations to make impossible decisions and are not fundamentally different in anyway than parents anywhere else.

*Female Students and Sexual Exchanges*

As previously mentioned, the majority of interviewees across participant groups cited an exchange of sex for grades and/or money as the underlying reason behind girls’ acceptance of teachers’ advances. The direct benefits of sleeping with teachers, as
presented by the students themselves, included extra points on assignments and exams, more leniency in the classroom, peer prestige and material gifts like cell phones, shoes, jewelry, bags, fabric or pocket money to purchase small everyday expenses such as phone credit, coal for cooking, soap, hair braiding, make-up, snacks and meals. Participants across groups listed these sorts of material items as the primary return or exchange for sex, and interestingly all but one participant saw no connection between these sexual exchanges and prostitution. The fact that girls and young women participate in these relationships primarily for financial reasons was presented, for the most part, in a very matter-of-fact fashion, suggesting that these transactions are commonplace enough that discussing them brought about little to no hesitation or shame. This further implied that these exchanges are common knowledge and not particularly surprising occurrences within the community. The extent to which female participants in these partnerships assess the potential risks and benefits of these exchanges was unclear as many participants mentioned the possibility of early, unplanned pregnancy and/or HIV/AIDS infection, but few underscored these dangerous possibilities as inhibiting the final decision-making process on choosing whether or not to participate in these relationships.

Participant responses did however suggest that the rate of exchange was oftentimes not entirely, fair or just, as girls often only received pocket change or very small, basic items in return for sex. For the most part when asked about the specific types of gifts and or benefits girls receive, students indicated that teachers do not even pay the 11,000 francs CFA (equivalent to US $23.00) for the girl to attend school, but that soap and basic essentials were the more common trade-offs for sex. Based on his own observations, one 17-year-old male student explains, “At the end of class you will see the
girl [who is sleeping with the teacher] often waiting to ask him (the teacher) for money for breakfast or money to buy new clothes, sometimes just soap so she can wash her school uniform once a week” (Jacques). Another 19-year-old male participant furthered this point stating that, “Typically, [sex between teachers and students] all begins with poverty. The girl goes to the teacher’s house for money, for small things like breakfast, charcoal for cooking, soap for washing herself and her clothes, school fees, and school supplies for the academic year” (Khadim).

However, other responses suggested that the overall possibility that these exchanges could bring about a larger lifestyle change, such as relocating to a larger city or moving beyond an agriculturalist-based livelihood, were a powerful motivator for girls. One 15-year-old male student clarified this belief, stating that, “There is always the hope that all of this (the sexual relationship) will lead to the bettering of her (the student’s) overall situation” (Barthelme). Adama, a single parent and agriculturalist, who never attended school herself, describes the motivations she believes encourage students to date their teachers,

It is because of money. When they (teachers) earn their salary at the end of the month they come to lie to the girls. In giving them a little sum of money to buy groceries the girls will follow them. These girls really aren’t intelligent. They think that this little amount of money will be sufficient in bringing them happiness.

Mostly however, the decision to participate in these relationships was presented as a survival or coping mechanism for economically disadvantaged girls and their families. Henri, a 19-year-old male student, articulates what he sees as the root cause of the acceptance of these relationships, positing that, “Due to poverty at the household level and the incapacities of the local population to meet their daily needs, girls are faced with
a situation in which they must give themselves to men in exchange for small gifts and money, in order to have their daily bread.” He goes on to describe a situation, in which,

Some girls tend to believe that sex is a way to success, for the girls who give themselves in exchange of gifts from men. You see, a girl who has infinite ambitions knowing that her parents don’t have the financial means to meet her needs will take the desperate measure of selling her body to find money with the intention of being on the same level as the child of the deputy or minister forgetting that in nature there are the most rich, the least rich and the least poor and the most poor.

Another 16-year-old male student describes scenarios he has heard about,

The teachers tell the girls, “I love you, come to my house, I will do the maximum in my capabilities to take care of you and help you.” They give them jewelry, little gifts, cell phones…it is an exchange. This is because of poverty. It is more often than not the poor girls who accept advances (Lamine).

These positions underscore community perceptions of the economic motivations behind the vast majority of teacher-student sexual relationships.

Commonly, in popular culture in Benin, an older and somewhat wealthy man who offers money to a less wealthy, younger female in return for sexual favors is referred to as a “papa gâteau” or “papa bonheur”, the French version of the term “sugar daddy”. As previously mentioned, sugar daddy relationships are a topic which have been increasingly examined by academic research in the African context because of their new array of dangerous implications and possibilities in this setting (Luke, 2003). Nevertheless, from a popular Western perspective, sugar daddy relationships are typically defined by an exchange of sex for luxury items, expensive high-end or name brand purses, shoes or even cars, not small items like soap and charcoal; the two most frequently stated items of exchange in this research. The value of these items and their “necessity” makes the relationships described in this research more problematic and exploitative because of the
risks involved for such small stakes of gain. Therefore, I see a distinction between trade-offs for items of necessity versus items of luxury, and although it becomes difficult to make these distinctions, their nuanced implications make a significant difference on how one can address the issue. The appropriation of the term “sugar daddy” seemed inappropriate for the much more exploitative and uneven interactions taking place in rural schools.

Furthermore, papa gâteau relationships in this research were particularly problematic due to the dangerous stakes of exchange in rural, low-income areas and more specifically in schools, as many of the exchanges described in this research were for no money at all, but merely points on exams and quizzes. In fact, teachers in various instances seemed aware of the simplicity and low material cost in wooing school girls as opposed to other local women. M. N’Oueni, a non-local teacher explains how it is more cost effective for a teacher to date his own student rather than other women in the community, “To date a girl student costs a lot less than dating a woman or girl from town because instead of money you can just pay her with points, so that she can pass into the next grade level without effort.” Further discussions about the “easiness” of rural girls came about in casual conversations in bars and among colleagues. In a bar setting, outside of the research site, one local government official, who had spent time posted in the community where this research was conducted, laughed as he explained to me, “Oh you taught in X (name of community). Then you should know, the girls there are so easy. You can sleep with a girl for as little as a bar of soap.” These particularly disturbing claims make the exchange rate for rural girls participating in these relationships
extraordinarily risky as teachers often have numerous partners and an endless amount of capital (points or small items of exchange) based merely on their profession.

When asked what girls receive in exchange for engaging in these types of relationships, the overwhelming majority of participants stated that there were in fact two types of girls who accept their teachers’ advances: poor girls who need the money (examined above) and rich lazy girls who want easy points. Florentine, a 16-year-old female participant explains, “For the girls it is the points and the money that they want. It is like prostitution for points…The rich girls do it for the points though.” M. Raoul, the president of the local Parent Teacher Association (Association des Parents d’Elèves or A.P.E.) and a local primary school director, pinpoints the two major motivating factors, he sees, behind girls’ acceptance of their teachers’ advances,

First of all, the girl wants to have good material possessions, maybe clothes, toiletries, or more necessity based items like food. The second factor is that many girls do not have a high level of achievement/low grades and they approach their teachers to cheat the system and get fake grades in order to pass into the next grade level.

While elaborating on the latter “type” (lazy, rich girls), a non-local teacher explains further, “They are the girls who do nothing in class, who do not study or work hard or get good grades. Then, [once they are having sex with the teacher] they really don’t have to even try” (M. N’Oueni). Rich girls were consistently vilified as being lazier and not as intelligent and therefore, additionally accused of being the primary perpetrators behind the corruption of the grading system by offering or accepting the exchange of sex for points on exams and assignments. A 19-year-old male student expands on this idea, “The daughters of the civil servants are luckier …they have the protection of their parents and of money. But often it is these girls who present themselves at their teachers’ homes
because they don’t work very hard in school” (Khadim). From her own observations, Leticia, a 21-year-old female student and wife of a teacher at the school, admits that, “Often towards the end of the year when the girls see that they cannot pass into the next grade level they will begin to come in the night and knock on their teachers’ doors just to spend the night with him and have the points to pass.” M. Hounssou venomously criticizes girl students who use sex to get ahead, “They have the mentality of beggars, those who don’t work but want to take advantage of others’ work.”

Not surprisingly, the issue of corruption in the grading system became a sensitive topic as oftentimes female students saw themselves as delicately positioned in a no-win situation. If girl students do well in class, regardless of whether or not their success is based on their own merit, their classmates will become suspicious that they are receiving grades based on “extra-curricular” activities with the teacher. Furthermore, an overwhelming number of participants explained, if female students are pursued by their teachers and refuse their grades are often in jeopardy.

Coercion

Nearly every research participant mentioned that girl students are constantly under the duress of avoiding, appeasing, and diplomatically negotiating their teachers’ advances. Female students explained that unwanted sexual advances are declined with caution and subtlety, and that coyness and intentional indirectness are key in avoiding the bruising of egos and risking one’s grades. Furthermore, nearly every female student participant told personal stories of either being approached by their teachers, refusing, and being penalized academically for their rejection or accepting out of fear of punishment. These claims of coercion, corruption, and abuse of power surfaced across
participant groups just as frequently as the association of teacher-student sexual relationships with an exchange of sex for money and grades, becoming a significant finding in this academic research.

It is critical to highlight some of these stories as they are a crucial part of understanding girl students’ classroom and schooling experience, including the everyday obstacles and challenges female students face in their struggles to obtain an education. When asked whether or not there were consequences for refusing a teacher’s advances, Bartheleme and Soubi, two 15-year-old male participants, explained that, “If a girl refuses the teacher will be against her” in the classroom via grading and discipline; normally, “He will make her fail the class.” This idea of the teacher becoming “against” the girl student as a result of unrequited love was a theme that emerged repeatedly throughout this research. Pascaline, a 15-year-old girl student, explains further, “If you refuse, he (the teacher) can give you hours after class or he can be against you in class with whatever you say or do.” Jeanne, an 18-year old female student insists that, “If the girl refuses he (the teacher) will cause problems for you in school. He will ask you difficult questions to embarrass you in front of the class and then insult you when you can’t respond. Also he will give you hours after class.” Salimatou, another 15-year-old female student, demonstrates this point explaining that, “If a girl refuses, the teacher will give her bad marks on her assignments.” She then continued this concept by giving a personal account of a teacher, who had pursued her,

There is one teacher who tried to do this to me. Because I often refused him, he gave me bad marks and in class, if other students were talking in my group or in the class, he would punish me. He would sometimes blame me in front of the
class. He would give me hours all the time, two hours here and two hours there... And when we were calculated our final grades at the end of the year I didn’t pass the class. I had something like a 7 out of 20 only. And it was only in his class that I was below average and did not pass.

Kanditcha and Jean-Pierre, two 17-year old male participants, concur with this type of story explaining a situation they experienced where their teacher was actively pursuing one of their classmates,

The teacher said in front of the whole class that he called on her after school and that she didn’t come and the girl was afraid of him until the point that she just stopped coming to class to avoid seeing him. She was in 6eme. You see there are girls who refuse and they suffer because of it. This is what I call sexual harassment.

Lamine, Aziz, and Ibrahim, 16, 15 and 18-year-old male focus group members explained how teachers are often clever about the ways in which they punish girls, so that they cannot be singled out for corruption by the administration. For example, “If the girl has a really weak grade point average the teacher can give a really difficult quiz at the last moment to everybody just to punish the girl… in order to guarantee that she fails.”

Khadim, a 19-year-old male student, reiterates these claims. When asked about the consequences placed on non-compliant girls who refuse their teachers’ advances, he stated that, “If the girl refuses she is mistreated at school. Even if her marks are good and she passes, they won’t be given to her… Many girls are afraid that the teachers are going to lower their grades if they refuse.” Parents were also aware of these claims. When asked why a girl may accept her teacher’s advances, M. N’Ouanti, a parent and chief of a cotton co-op in the region, states that, “There is intimidation in it, it is he (the teacher) who gives the grades at the end of the month… [And] obviously there are consequences

Giving hours is a form of detention where students lose behavior points and must stay after class.
for the girl if she refuses. She will be sanctioned by her grades.” M. Bernard, a high-level politician and parent of a daughter who was infected with HIV/AIDS due to a sexual relationship with her teacher, explains that, “For the most part the teachers corner the girls. They have to retake the class or will be kicked out of school if they refuse.” Here, obviously the level of choice or agency on behalf of female students is seriously impaired by the use of force, coercion and intimidation. Even teachers who do not explicitly or overtly threaten their students with punishments for refusal, inadvertently evoke feelings of obligation and menace for girls who have seen the consequences for many of their classmates who have refused and suffered as a result.

**Consequences of Teacher-Student Relationships**

*Corruption of Grades and Undermining Female Achievement*

Research participants across groups cited academic grades and the ability to pass into the next grade level as major motivating factors behind female student participation in teacher-student sexual relationships. The overarching theme of grades came about in two contrasting ways; firstly, as a way for female students to use their sexuality to “corrupt” the system, and secondly as a dangerous punishment for girls who refuse their teachers' advances. Participant responses as to why female students would accept their teachers’ advances, in the domain of grades for sex included a variety of responses, “because they [girls] don’t work hard in school and they want easy grades,” “because they want easy points and to pass into the next grade level without effort,” “because they’ve become lazy in the educative domain…they’ve become dependent on using their teachers,” “they are the type who do nothing in class,” “because they are looking for extra points on assignments and better grades,” “because they didn’t merit the grades
necessary to pass into the next grade level,” “because they lack passing grades and they want to pass,” and “many girls do not have a high level of achievement and they approach their teachers to cheat the system and get fake grades in order to pass into the next grade level.” The plethora of responses highlighted above points to another important level of analysis regarding community perceptions of girls and their place in the academic system.

The seemingly pervasive idea that sexuality is a weapon which can be used to get ahead is problematic on many levels. First, it creates gender divisions between female students and their male classmates, who often already challenge and contest the merit of females’ work and presence in the educative domain. Second, it creates tensions between girls who sleep with their teachers and girls who do not. Third, it has the potential to discredit laudable contributions by female students as it puts into question the validity of all female work and achievement. The question always lingers, did she really earn those grades or is she just sleeping with the teacher? All of these issues will be explored here, as well as the equally problematic assertion that teachers use their power and position to coerce their students into sexual relationships via their grades.

For male students, the idea that their female comrades have an unfair advantage over them in the classroom, which they can never surpass or obtain, creates feelings of hostility and suspicion towards their female classmates. Khadim, a 19-year-old male student explains some of the unfair advantages girl students benefit from when involved with their teachers, “If the teacher is with her, he will give her points or whenever there is a test, he will bring a copy of it to his home in advance so that she can study the correct answers.” Many participants blamed girls for initiating these relationships. Kanditcha, a
17-year-old male student, expresses this viewpoint, “There are girls who, it is important to note, provoke their teachers. In the classroom even! They have their distinctive mannerisms and wear make-up. This is part of the corruption of grades and points that takes place.” Benoit, a 15-year-old male student, explains how he and his colleagues survey and supervise the validity of female students’ grades,

At the time of the distribution of grades or test copies we listen. We know if she doesn’t speak a lot in class that she has not worked. So, if she receives a good grade it is almost impossible that she caught up with her work at the very last moment. So we will take her paper from her for reclamations. We will compare it to our proof and say “But you see I found this here, why didn’t you give me a point but you gave her a point.” There is often corruption.

Sédou, a 16-year-old male participating in the same focus group, elaborates this point, additionally addressing his frustration with the lack of viable reporting options for students,

We know the capacity of all the girls in our class because of the study groups we have organized. If we are suspicious of a girl and a teacher we will carefully observe her grades in the class to see if she actually deserves her marks. If I work and I am killing myself studying and it is me who has a lower grade than this girl then I am not going to get along with the teacher. But I will not directly say that to the teacher. It is completely by chance whether he will know if we are not happy with him or not. We don’t go to the school administration either because we are afraid of the consequences, like if the teacher finds out that we reported him.

The widespread nature of these relationships and the ambivalence at which students view their options for changing these behaviors is summed up by Dominique, a 16-year-old male student who explains, “There are lots of times girls get grades they don’t deserve, we only grumble about it, nobody does anything.” The only expressed recourse for filtering out female students who have illegitimately progressed through grade levels via corruption appeared to be the much feared national exams, which although often perceived as overly difficult, were the only means of official standardization and weeding
out corruption. Kassa, a 17-year old student, explains how his some of female friends justify their choice to engage in relationships with their teachers,

They also say that in giving themselves they should also get good grades from the teacher. The girls have told me that really without doing that that they couldn’t survive and that in doing that they are well looked upon in school and they can find also good grade to pass into the next grade level. But I have told them that this isn’t good because eventually they will have to take the national exams and they will not pass. Often we say that when one knows nothing one can’t go anywhere in life.

Feelings of jealousy and frustration were not unique to males, as other female students equally expressed frustration towards their colleagues who had chosen to sleep with their teachers.

Jeanne, an 18-year-old female student, explains how these relationships influence inner-classroom dynamics between girls, “The other girls will be jealous if she has good grades and doesn’t work hard. If you, yourself work for your grades and she has better grades than you, you will be jealous.” When also commenting on student reactions to teacher-student sexual relationships, M. N’Oueni explains, “If the girl has a 15 or 17 the other students will know [that there is something going on]. They will make fun of the girl. Some of the other girls will even be jealous because they want to take the girls’ place but they can’t.” Sexual relationships between teachers and students prove to disrupt the classroom experience, creating unnecessary tensions, distractions, worries and frustrations both for the individuals directly involved and the rest of the classroom.

Another damaging effect of teacher-student romances is the distrust that is created towards all female students’ academic achievement. M. N’Oueni admits that there are occasions where girls are falsely accused of sleeping with their teachers, “Sometimes even if the girl works well in class other students will accuse her of “being the friend” of
the teacher.” This unfortunate consequence is rooted in perceptions that there is a high occurrence of sex and corruption, matched with widespread perceptions that female students are less successful academically in comparison to males. These perceptions serve to illegitimate female achievement and contribute to the timidity and apprehension girl students face in the classroom. Moreover, a female student encounters many levels of stress in the classroom from the possibility that a teacher taking an academic interest in her work is looking for more, to concerns that excessive participation and/or academic achievement will signal other students to make assumptions about her personal relationship with the teacher.

These stressors make the classroom a tense environment of intimidation and control. Pascaline, a 15-year-old female student demonstrates this counter-perspective underlying the difficult position in which female students find themselves,

If you accept, even if you have worked very hard and done very well on your own, all the other students are going to say that it is only because of your relations with the teacher that you have received a good grade. And other students will often make fun of you. If you are a pretty girl you can’t win. Even if you work hard other people won’t accept that you deserve your grades.

Unfortunately, many girls do find themselves in a delicate situation, constantly balancing their physical appearance enough to keep up on beauty trends without attracting unwanted attention from their teachers, participating and achieving well enough academically to pass without triggering suspicions of their classmates, and resisting unsolicited advances tactfully enough to avoid academic penalization.

**Reporting and Enforcement**

On the level of evaluating current practices and identifying possibilities for finding ways forward, interviews and focus group sessions concluded with questions
regarding the process by which female students currently report undesired sexual advances or harassment by a teacher, administrator or colleague, and the way in which these reports are typically handled in the school and community. Additionally, I asked participants to brainstorm possible solutions or improvements which could be made to the current system in order to more successfully eliminate inappropriate teacher-student sexual relationships. Issues of reporting, or more accurately the lack of reporting options for young women and their parents, was a particularly troubling finding of this research.

Many students stated that, officially, if a pressurized sexual relationship or harassment had occurred, a student would normally be expected to go to the school administration. The common response to questions regarding who a female student could go to if a teacher was harassing her included some combination of peaceful mediation between teachers and parents or a possibility of reporting the incident to another teacher, the school director, or the gendarmerie. One local teacher, M. Kounara explained the typical process which ensues after a sexual harassment report, “Here the director will have a meeting with the teacher and discuss morals so that the teacher stops and that is all. If not, in bigger cities where people are more aware about their rights and the functioning of government they can bring the teacher to jail or to trial.” When asked what a female student can do or who she can talk to if she wants to report a teacher who is pursing her, Rufine, an 18-year-old female student gives a similar version of events but adds further insights,

To react in class is difficult because girls here are very timid. But she should go talk to another teacher who is a friend of his (the harasser) who doesn’t do that (harass female students) himself to explain her problem. And the friend can approach him and if he doesn’t listen he can go to the administration. But they will only talk with him about it.
However, following even this extremely loose protocol became problematic as students mentioned that either high level administrators also engaged in these behaviors and therefore would not severely punish others, or a situation emerged in which parents would accept money as compensation from the accused teacher. Wahabou, a 15-year-old male student, explains, “They (the school administration) have never imprisoned or fired a teacher for that here, especially if he (the teacher) asked for forgiveness. Maybe if a girl gets pregnant her parents will ask questions about who did it and bring the teacher to the director but oftentimes they will forgive him if he takes care of the girl and the baby.”

The school director himself described a scenario, in which he attempted to sanction a teacher but was stopped by the girl student’s family,

> When there is consent between both parties there isn’t a problem but when the teacher tries to force it, it is a problem. In the latter case there are sanctions, one month without salary. The one time I actually implemented this, the girl’s mother came in and asked what my problem was, that this was a family problem not a public one and I was obliged to drop it (M. Nago).

In M. Nago’s comment contradictions emerge as pregnancy was cited by the vast majority of other research participants as the only way to implement the law (as it provides concrete evidence of sexual relations), and yet, the director’s comment suggested that when a girl gets pregnant the teacher automatically marries her making the pregnancy a family issue outside of his jurisdiction. This practice complicates his role as enforcer as the pregnancy (i.e. sexual relationship) becomes a matter for families and not schools.

> Equally problematic, the accusation and belief that many members of the school administration were also implicated in these relationships and behaviors made students and parents question the legitimacy of their authority. Parfait, an 18-year-old
male student explains why enforcement is currently not happening locally, “The problem here is that we need an administration that is not also implicated. If not, they cannot seriously punish others for doing the same thing they do.” This conflict of interest on the level of the supposed enforcers of this law emerges as extraordinarily problematic.

The fact that the school administration is reluctant or has failed to share information about national law and school policy is a major issue which resurfaced throughout interviews as many individuals were unaware of the existence of the law. Wahabou, a 15-year-old male student, recommends what he views as a solution to eliminating these relationships, “We must change our behavior first. They need to teach all the people about it (teacher-student sexual relationships) and afterwards if a teacher does it he can be punished and be sent to prison for 5 years. We should vote in a law about it.” Khadim, another 19-year-old male student, adds, “We should create a law about all of this. Because we have often denounced teachers who do this and if there were a law this could all be eliminated and it would encourage people to denounce others who do this as well.” Although insightful and well thought-out, Wahabou and Khadim’s responses speak to the lack of awareness about existing legislation and policy. Kassa, a 17-year-old male student expresses his own confusion on the issue, “I don’t know for sure that there is a concrete law for that here. But I am sure that I have never seen or heard about the law actually being enforced.” Similarly, when asked if he was aware of the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law, one teacher, M. Hounnsou, stated, “In the family code? Maybe. Nobody knows. We never know. If I were headmaster I would demand a copy and distribute that.” When questioned why he believes that the current headmaster has not yet shared the 2006 law with teachers and students, M. Hounnsou stated, “He can’t.
He isn’t objective because he is involved himself…. If DDEPS\textsuperscript{36} (Deparemental d’Enseneigment Primair et Secondaire) finds out they will tell the education minister and he will be placed where he can be controlled.” The questioning of the credibility and legitimacy of individual educators, administrators, the school system as a whole, and even national law are an unfortunate consequence of non-existent or non-enforced policies regarding teacher-student sexual relationships.

Likewise, despite the high-rate of teacher-student sexual encounters taking place and the 2006 Sexual Harassment Law, which makes sex between teachers and students illegal, no single individual across participant groups could recall an incident within the community, at the secondary level, where a teacher had lost his job, been brought to trial or arrested for engaging in a sexual relationship with his student. Leticia, a 19-year-old female student states, “The law is here but it has never been put into practice. We neglect the law.” Similarly, Christine, a 15-year-old female student, confirmed that she also was aware that a law exists which makes teacher-student relationships forbidden; however, “Up to today there has never yet been a person who has lost his job or been put in prison because of being a part of one of these relationships.”

Many parents and students similarly voiced what they saw as the crux of this issue, “People say there is a law against that (teacher-student sexual relationships) but it isn’t applied. The law doesn’t hit people hard enough. If there was more enforcement then people would stop” (M. Koyiri, parent). M. Raoul, another parent and retired primary school director echoed this concern, “The way the law is written, current sanctions won’t completely eradicate this. It is difficult when the text isn’t applied then

\textsuperscript{36} The Department of Secondary and Primary School Education
sanctions don’t work. The phenomenon will diminish when the law hits harder.” One 17-year-old male student’s response demonstrates a similar viewpoint, “There have always been lots of laws to punish, reprimand, cut the contract, etc. but they are never applied. So long as the girl doesn’t die from abortion or something, nothing happens” (Kassa). The lack of precedence for punishing these behaviors trivializes their enormously negative impact on girls’ education and the actual learning environment and delegitimizes the power and importance of national and local law. M. Yangi a parent and retired primary school director explains, “It is the government that should take the responsibility and actually punish people. If they aren’t punishing people at their level we can do nothing here.”

Many solutions which came forward were rooted in a desire for more information, the need for increased community awareness, a better reporting system and stricter enforcement (or creation of) sexual harassment and sexual relationship policy in the school. However, participant-generated solutions for eradicating these relationships and behaviors widely ranged in feasibility and appropriateness. One 18-year-old female student described the common recourses for a girl experiencing harassment,

She can drop-out of school. Or she can try to speak with the director or vice-principle. They can talk to the teacher and tell him to leave the girl alone. Normally, they will tell the girl to stay calm and to take care of herself so that she can finish the school year in peace. And it is necessary to do all possible to avoid the teacher for the rest of the year and not speak with him (Jeanne).

Jeanne’s solution is not an acceptable option for female students, as it should be the responsibility of school officials and educators, not the girls, to create a peaceful learning environment. Another particularly disturbing suggestion came from the school director, who, in response to a question asking for possible solutions for limiting or eradicating
teacher-student relationships, stated, “We can send the girls home in mass.... Just kidding” (Mr. Nago).

Despite these disconcerting responses, many more applicable and credible responses to the call for solutions emerged across participant groups. One male student focus group came up with ideas ranging from an awareness campaign about the law and the consequences of HIV/AIDS and a reading comprehension on sexual harassment used in schools to educate young people, to the creation of a concrete reporting system. Francois, an 18-year-old male participant from this group stated that, “The problem is that there is no reporting system. We must develop a system here where we can come forward and complain...And we have to educate the parents about the system as well.” Another member of the group injected, “Everyone knows that it isn’t good but they refuse to change. It is on the level of the girl that we must make changes, on the level of parents as well. The parents play an important role in all of this” (Sedou). Leticia, a 17-year-old female student saw lack of female student awareness as a major issue but held reservations about whether or not these relationships could ever be eliminated, “Oftentimes the girls are afraid because they don’t know their rights at school. The girls should be made aware. But, these relationships will never disappear, there are too many things like that going on here…” Henri, another male student contributed his opinion,

To me, this situation is very complicated, because the problem isn’t situated in one camp. The girls are as responsible for the provocation as the teachers. Nevertheless, I would ask for a heavy awareness and sensitivity-training for the teachers. There must be sanctions for those who break the rules. There has to be a rigorous surveillance of the situation.

One teacher, M. Gewanou suggested, “We could change if.... [Well] the law exists, it is just the implementation and decentralization of the law that is the problem. There could
be a group or a person who could watch for perpetrators and gather information on those implicated. But it is on the level of the parents and administration where the fight should be carried out.” When more seriously responding to the question regarding possible solutions, the school director drastically changed his approach and stated what he saw as under-addressed yet key issues,

We should work to limit the age disparities in the classrooms and send girls to school very early. We have to make the students and parents aware about what is an appropriate relationship between a teacher and student. There could be a club for both teachers and students where people could learn and talk about these issues (M. Nago).

When discussing possibilities of creating a reporting system, it is no surprise that several teachers became extremely nervous and questioned, “What if a girl falsely accuses an innocent person of harassing her” (M.Gewanou)? “Is this not a possibility with all laws and accusations?” I asked. “I just don’t know if we can trust the girls,” he replied. His concern for being “falsely accused” is suspicious and more likely rooted in feelings of guilt and fear of retribution. Overall, there needs to be open dialogue within and between stakeholder groups about these issues and communities must come together to share their perspectives, experiences, and recommendations for eradicating these relationships and finding suitable alternatives and sanctions.

One story of enforcement which was particularly poignant was told by M. Bernard, a parent and high level politician, whose daughter had recently been infected with HIV/AIDS as a direct result of a teacher-student sexual relationship. He explained that he had sent his daughter to an exclusive all-girls, Catholic boarding school in the regional capital in order for her to gain the maximum from her studies. However, in late 2008, parents discovered that more than twelve girls had been infected with HIV/AIDS
from the same male teacher. The girls were said to be jumping over the stone wall of the
compound at night to meet with him. The teacher was from the South and was arrested
and sentenced in April of 2009. M. Bernard explained,

My daughter was among the girls who contracted the HIV virus from this teacher
and I was involved in the organization of parents who brought this man to the
authorities. For my daughter I brought this teacher to the brigade. Because this
happened in the regional capital we were better placed to do something about it.

M. Bernard acknowledged that reporting normally does not occur as it did in his
daughter’s case, but because of the high profile and media attention of this particular
incident, authorities were quick to act because of public outcry. He explained that
although there are many laws in place to prevent teachers from dating their students,
“The gendarmes say that they don’t have the text to punish people.” Furthermore, he gave
his perspective on the issue of reporting and enforcement,

It is problem in our education system and the formation of education professionals.
Teaching the morals behind our actions needs to be taught to those in the
profession. Right now this doesn’t exist. We have to add these lessons to what
they (teachers) learn in teaching-colleges... Also, even though this happened to
my daughter the boarding schools are better for girls because they have a wall that
separates the girls from predators.

“By predators you mean teachers?” I asked. He laughed, “Why yes, I suppose I do.” M.
Bernard and his daughter’s experience serves as an unfortunate reminder of the costs and
consequences of not seriously addressing the risky sexual interactions between teachers
and students. Clearly there is an overwhelming need to establish a comprehensive school
policy regarding teacher-student sexual relations, along with a reporting system to
eliminate the most exploitative and coercive forms of the sexual relationships taking
place.
Conclusion

The findings and analysis chapter of this research has been based on participant-generated responses to questions regarding community perceptions of sexual relationships between teachers and their students. Major themes which emerged throughout interviews and focus group sessions were organized into various categories including responsibility for initiating teacher-student sexual relationships, structural or environmental circumstances and realities which facilitate female, parental, and even societal acceptance of these relationships, the various consequences of these relationships for those involved, and reflections on reporting and enforcement practices. Overarching or central issues encountered throughout this research include the transactional nature of the relationships taking place between teachers and their students and the structural inequalities/power systems which motivate and facilitate individual actors’ initiation or acceptance of these relationships. Community-based perceptions and conceptualizations of teacher-student sexual relationships are essential as they offer local insights on how these relationships form, why they are tolerated, and how community members justify and react to reported incidents. Without fully understanding the inner dynamics and environmental factors which contribute to the continuation of these relationships it becomes nearly impossible to adequately address, limit or eliminate these interactions. The final chapter of this research offers policy recommendations or ways forward in raising awareness and eradicating sexual interactions between female students and their male educators.
Chapter Four

Policy Recommendations/Solutions

A major finding and contribution of this research is the realization that schools have become environments which support and facilitate sexual harassment and transactional sexual relationships between teachers and students, both actively and passively, through complex power structures, the culture of silence and societal acceptance. Much of this support has been maintained through passive, covert, and subtle inaction. Here, inaction must be viewed a form of action. Elimination of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence or coercion against girls and young women has long been on the development agenda at international, national and local levels. The lack of reporting systems, inadequate knowledge about the sexual harassment law and individual rights, along with the suspicion that authorities are also involved in these sorts of behaviors inhibit enforcement and the elimination of these dangerous and coercive interactions. The refusal to acknowledge, implement, and enforce policies which aim to protect girls and young women in the school setting is a crucial barrier to the realization of local, national, and international goals concerning girls ‘education. Furthermore, the realization that many of these sexual exchanges are in fact transactional and somewhat consensual in nature, although maintained through asymmetrical power hierarchies and environmental or structural factors, including poverty and the teacher transfer system, is a missing element, creating an incomplete conceptualization of the complex variations within teacher-student sexual relationships and interactions.

It becomes increasingly essential that policies and programs designed to intervene “on behalf of” girls and young women include an in-depth understanding of, not only the
gendered nature of these sexual encounters, but also the external factors which increase the likelihood of female students’ acceptance of engaging in these relationships and behaviors. The primary factors which emerged throughout this research include poverty, lack of social mobility options, a corrupt grading system, a teacher transfer policy which eliminates social accountability structures and a culture of silence among low-income parents who see little choice outside of obligatory acceptance of their daughters’ involvement in these relationships. The general lack of awareness about sexual harassment law, school policies pertaining to teacher-student sexual relationships, and the costs and consequences of engaging in these risky behaviors facilitates participant acceptance on all levels. Female students need to be provided with the school policies and national laws which supposedly exist to benefit and protect them. Furthermore, individuals, especially young people, need to be armed with the language and concepts with which to name, describe and recognize inappropriate behaviors and interactions.

An additional element of the continuation of asymmetrical power hierarchies within schools and communities which leads to sexual relations between teachers and their students is an abhorrent lack of understanding, at all levels, of the way in which girls and young women experience education. As previously demonstrated, girls throughout this research were held to contradictory and often near impossible standards. Additionally, suggestions to more tightly police female students’ appearance and monitor their behaviors was one of the most cited solutions to eliminating teacher-student sexual encounters. Furthermore, the pressure for girls to succeed in the academic setting (where they are already an overwhelming minority), despite familial, cultural, economic, and
educative restrictions and limitations, creates unnecessary stressors in addition to more general adolescent pressures.

Another important consideration includes the realization that personal accounts are able to serve as testaments to the gendered-nature of sexual harassment and are essential in creating awareness and generating understanding of how and why these sexual relationships form and are reinforced through silence and inaction. As Wynd (1999) demonstrates in her own work, the World Bank, United Nations and other international development agencies’ policies on girls’ education have lacked local and cultural understandings of the on-the-ground realities and obstacles girls and young women face when obtaining an education. Additionally, little attention has been paid to how these relationships also manipulate and exploit boys and young men who are either caught in the crossfire between their teachers and classmates’ relationships or used as middlemen in the formation of these relationships. Not fully exploring or understanding sexual relationships between teachers and students from the perspectives of all stakeholders involved has contributed to the lack of sexual harassment implementation and enforcement and the continuation of dangerous sexual interactions in schools.

The inconsistencies and discrepancies between local, national and international policies and understandings of the justifications behind these sexual interactions is a challenging yet crucial element of implementation. Disconnects (either geographical or ideological) between these various levels including individual actors’ motivation and varying conceptualization of sexual harassment and asymmetrical, transactional, sexual relationships as a phenomenon is the primary cause of confusion and non-compliance on the part of schools, administrations and individual actors. Laws, policies, and projects
which have not included the involvement of community stakeholders in their development and decision making processes are seen as very top-down and create friction as there is little to no local ownership of the ideas, concepts, and projects being implemented and enforced.

Various studies have shown that when a sexual harassment policy is in place and widely disseminated amongst all stakeholder groups, students, parents, teachers, and administrators are made aware that sexual relationships between teachers and students are illegal and will not be tolerated in the school (Lee, Croninger, Linn, & Chen, 1996; Stauss & Espeland, 1992). Teachers, students and administrators must know “what behaviors constitute sexual harassment, know the steps to follow if it occurs, know the consequences to the harasser, know the rights and responsibilities of the individual to prevent sexual harassment from happening, [and] that there is confidential help and support available for the victim” (Strauss & Espeland, 1992, p. 23). The creation and implementation of these policies could be spearheaded, organized and monitored by local parent teach associations or women’s groups who are already well established and well positioned in the community to deal with sensitive issues involving women and children.

As previously stated, one major barrier to eliminating sexual encounters between teachers and students is that “sexual harassment,” as a term, does not adequately describe the majority of the sexual relationships and behaviors taking place. Individual school policies, national law, and official pedagogical or teacher trainings need to include discussions of transactional sexual relationships in order to address actual problems and realities taking place in schools. Those working at the international, national and local level need to find culturally appropriate language and ways of describing inappropriate
teacher behaviors in ways which will be understood by the very people they affect. Sexual harassment as a term proves inadequate as it pinpoints only one element of an array of risky and dangerous behaviors within the educative domain that affect young girls and women. Epistemologies are critical in creating awareness and confronting socio-cultural phenomena because they tend to frame the way people think about, talk about and understand the behaviors and motivations of the individuals involved. Sexual encounters have continued post the creation of sexual harassment law in Benin partially because the law itself does not directly address the transactional nature of the exchanges taking place in local schools and communities.

The inconsistency between national law and policy and community level understanding of teacher-student sexual relationships has been a major obstacle in challenging and eliminating these sexual interactions. National and international law has focused on eradicating “sexual harassment” from the standpoint of punishing male perpetrators whereas, at the local level female students have been viewed as the primary instigators of these relationships. Because sexual relationships include the involvement of at least two parties, it is essential that both viewpoints broaden their understandings and recommendations in order to address both actors. The dominate perception that these relationships are provoked by female students’ clothing, hair styles, and/or physical appearance must be challenged along with common myths that women ask for, want, deserve or provoke harassment, rape or assault. The responsibility of eliminating these relationships needs to shift from a primary focus on policing girls and young women to working also with male educators and boy students. Men and boys groups should be formed in order to facilitate discussion of critical topics such as the rights of women and
children and the importance of girls’ education including dialogue about girls’ educational experiences in the community. Furthermore, educators must be made aware that although sexual encounters may appear to be consensual, there are structural and environmental inequalities along with power asymmetries which make any sexual encounter between a student and her teacher inherently problematic and exploitative.

Another long-term and large scale change that needs to take place within Benin’s education system is active recruitment through perhaps a national scholarship program to increase the participation of both Northerners and women in higher education and teaching programs. These two marginalized groups are drastically underrepresented in the higher education system due to issues of access. A larger representation from both of these groups will be useful in providing role models and opportunities for Northern students and young women from the North and will help balance the education system’s current uneven demographics at the secondary level. The presence of educated female teachers in rural communities will provide female students with allies and individuals they can seek out if they need assistance and will limit the infiltration of non-local and unaccountable males in rural communities.

In framing and creating a comprehensive and transparent “sexual harassment” or “code of conduct” policy, school administrations must actively involve all community stakeholders in the writing, implementation, reporting, and enforcement process, perhaps through a more neutral organization such as the local Parent Teacher Association. The first essential element necessary in the creation of a solid and enforceable sexual harassment/code of conduct policy is the inclusion of a philosophy statement regarding the phenomenon itself, one which emphasizes that these behaviors are both illegal and
will not be tolerated on any level. Parents, teachers, students and administrators must clearly understand that there will be consequences for the discovery of these relationships and that these consequences will be supported by national and international law regarding the safety and security of young women and students. Additionally, all stakeholder groups must come together to agree upon and write out a working definition of sexual harassment/inappropriate sexual relationships, including a list of specific behaviors which are considered unacceptable for clarification purposes. Furthermore, the policy must include a well formulated step-by-step sanction system for harassers. For example, for a student harasser these steps may include a progression of sanctions such as a verbal or written warning, an apology, a written assignment on the topic, a parent/teacher conference, suspension, expulsion, a monetary fine, community service, or the involvement of law enforcement. For adult harassers there would need to be a separate and more severe policy in place, one which coincides with national law. Additionally, students, teachers and staff should participate in the creation and signing of a staff/teacher/student code of conduct to ensure understanding and awareness of the school policy and to hold each party accountable to their contracts, including a statement of confidentiality to protect victims and reporters.

Parents, school administrators, teachers and students should elect or identify individuals to report to in the case of a sexual harassment or corruption of grades incident. This process should involve in-depth planning, organization, and training components for the individuals chosen to work as intermediaries and watchdogs. There must be the creation of a concrete reporting process/procedure/system including a dissemination component to ensure that the reporting system has reached all community stakeholders.
This policy needs to include details such as the time frame for reporting and processing a complaint, a sanctions procedure for incidents of varying degrees of severity, a statement addressing retaliation or reprisal and the referral of victims to legal, psychological or medical services.

Most importantly students, teachers and parents must be provided with a statement which describes both students’ and the institution’s rights and responsibilities. In attempts of supporting those who have been coerced or otherwise forced into these relationships, students and parents must be provided with information regarding how and where to seek medical, psychological or legal assistance. Other young people and adults need to be made aware of how to provide support for friends or family who seek them out for help and understanding. Lastly, this code of conduct policy and reporting procedure must provide the community with a detailed description of the investigative process which will be used to examine and investigate reported incidents along with a grievance procedure for those who feel as though they have been wrongly accused. The creation of a solid reporting system and sexual harassment policy, in collaboration with the local community will involve parents, teachers, students and administrators in the shaping of a safer classroom environment for all.

Conclusion

The alarming and common prevalence of teacher-student sexual relationships in secondary schools throughout Benin is an issue which demands more attention and research. The current literature on Benin-specific statistics is extremely weak and many doubt the depth and scope of the problem due to the lack of concrete evidence. My overall intention here has been to problematize and add to the scarce literature on sexual
harassment enforcement and implementation in Benin’s schools and to promote awareness with hopes of generating political action by law makers, increased enforcement by law enforcement agencies, and reporting system implementation by school administrations and local communities. The findings here suggest that sexual harassment as a concept is an inadequate description of the wide array of actual, often transactional sexual encounters taking place on the ground. This research’s findings suggest that so long as transactional sexual relationships are mutually beneficial for both the female students and male teachers’ involved in them these behaviors will continue to flourish as these interactions fall outside of the mainstream “sexual harassment” discourse. The involvement of all community stakeholders in establishing a clear understanding of acceptable and unacceptable relationships and interactions between teachers and their students, including the creation of a concrete school policy and reporting system for those who violate these agreed upon terms is an important way of creating community ownership of the entire process. More profound research which engages the perceptions and voices of all community stakeholders will lead to a better understanding of why these sexual encounters occur and what strategies can best eradicate the problem at its roots. Overall, this research hopes to create space for girl students to express their realities, voice their concerns and to expose the misunderstood realities of teacher-student sexual relationships in hope of creating a safer and healthier learning experience and classroom environment for all.
References


Korf v. Ball State University, 726 F.2d 1222 (7th Cir. 1989).


Figure 1 Map of Benin

Credit: UNDP website (http://www.bj.undp.org/fr/lebenin.html)
Figure 2 Government Sponsored Billboard
Figure 3 Taxi-Moto Shirt
Appendix 1: Definitions of Operational Terms

**Age of Consent:** The minimum age at which a person is considered to be legally competent of consenting to sexual acts

**Flirting:** Consensual, playful and alluring behaviors or interactions between two individuals

**Gendered stereotypes of adolescent sexuality:** Boys will be boys, she can’t take a joke, she asked for it, she enjoys it, all boys want is sex, the way she dresses says she wants it, it’s only flirting, let them have their fun, she’s a trouble maker

**Girl/woman/female students:** There is some major slippage with these terms both in the literature and within this study. The blurry distinctions between these developmental rankings of women become problematic in several ways. The employment of one of these terms over the other becomes critical as each word embodies varying degrees and valuative levels of meaning which can invoke more or less sympathy and represent differential levels of agency on behalf of these individuals. The line here has been blurred as there exist differing ages of consent between US and Beninois culture, discrepancies in “actual age” as the age written on official identity cards are often changed throughout the years in order to make students eligible for schooling if they have not advanced to the next level “in time”, and the fact that many “female” students interviewed or referred to in interviews are over 18 and in some cases as old as 25. Referring to all female secondary school students as “girls” became problematic.

**Papa Gâteau or Papa Bonheur:** The French version of the English term *sugar daddy* translating as “daddy cakes” or “goodtime daddy” which has been appropriated and adopted into Beninois culture to describe a relationship in which a young, less wealthy
girl enters into a relationship with an older and wealthier man in exchange for money or material goods.

**Physical conduct of a sexual nature:** Inappropriate and unwanted touch

**Sensibilisé:** To be made aware or conscientious about something typically related to one's wellbeing, health, or rights

**Sensibilization:** Awareness or conscientious raising campaign, workshop or program.

Both sensibilisé and sensibilization are frequently used in reference to NGO projects and programs that enter the community to “teach” or “introduce” the general population to new and/or important information regarding their wellbeing, health, or rights.

**Sexual Advances:** Coming on to someone, trying to lure or convince someone to participate in a sexual act

**Sexual Favors:** Sexual acts performed in return for a reward, such as money or a grade

**Sexual Harassment:** Any unwanted sexual verbal or physical act or advance initiated primarily by males in a position of power over females. Although females can certainly harass males, the context of this study did not allow for this level of analysis due to the absence of female secondary school teachers in the region. Beninois law stipulates that harassment can only occur in circumstances where the harasser is in a position of power over the victim and can directly use this power to deny access to job promotions, timely pay, grades or other benefits. This definition becomes problematic in that a teacher cannot be charged with harassing a fellow teacher nor a student harassing a fellow student because of the power dynamic element. I use the term sexual relations to refer to consensual and/or transactional relationships where blatant coercion is not being used to force participation.
**Sexual Harassment perpetrator/offender/harasser:** The words here are used to describe the doer of sexual harassment. All of these terms have been employed interchangeably throughout the text as not to validate one over the other.

**Sexual Harassment victim/survivor/target/harassee:** The words here are used to describe the recipient of sexually harassing behaviors. All of these terms have been employed interchangeably throughout the text depending on context as not to validate one over the other. Because of the varying forms in which sexual harassment manifests itself and the different reactions to harassment by those involved, there is no single word which encapsulates and embodies the status/placement/mental state of the “harassed”.

**Sexual Relations:** Sexual acts, relationships, or transactions between two consenting parties where blatant/overt coercion is not being used to force participation. I acknowledge that there exist inherent asymmetrical power dynamics and that economic and environmental factors are also at play, but chose to employ this term in order to grant some level of agency to those participating in these relationships.

**Sugar Daddy Syndrome:** An American slang term for a situation in which a rich man offers money or gifts to a less wealthy younger female in return for sexual favors.

**Transactional Sexual Relationships:** A direct exchange of sex or sexual behaviors for grades, points, money or small gifts.

**Verbal conduct of a sexual nature:** Inappropriate and unwanted comments about a person’s body, clothing, gender, sexuality, etc.
Appendix 2: Victory Way’s 2007-2008 Sexual Harassment Survey

French and English Translation

1. Accepteriez-vous ce qui suit ?  
Do you accept the following?

| I.1 Qu’un professeur **faire la cour** à son élève ?  
| That a teacher hits on (pursues) a student? |
| I.2 Qu’une élève fasse des **avances** à son professeur ?  
| That a student makes advances to her teacher? |
| I.3 Qu’un(e) élève visite son professeur à des **heures tardives** ?  
| That a student visits her teacher after hours? |
| I.4 Qu’un professeur accepte des **visites** de son élève aux **heures tardives** ?  
| That a teacher accepts visits from students after hours? |
| I.5 Qu’un professeur **couche** avec son élève ?  
| That a teacher sleeps with his student? |
| I.6 Qu’un professeur **donner les points** à son élève après les services rendus ?  
| That a teacher gives points to a student after receiving “services”? |
| I.7 Qu’un(e) élève **rendre service** à son professeur pour augmenter sa moyenne ?  
| That a student renders a “service” to her teacher to augment her grade? |
| I.8 Qu’un professeur **épouse** son élève ?  
| That a teacher marries his student? |

2. Avez-vous déjà été témoin des comportements suivants ?  
Have you ever witnessed/heard about the following behaviors?

| II.1 Un professeur qui fait la cour à son élève ?  
| A teacher who pursues a student? |
| II.2 Une élève qui fait la cour à son professeur ?  
| A student who pursues a teacher? |
| II.3 Un professeur qui se marie à son élève ?  
| A teacher who marries his student? |
| II.4 Un professeur qui accepte la visite de ses élèves aux heures tardives ?  
| A teacher who accepts a visit from his students after hours? |
| II.5 Un(e) élève qui rend visite à son professeur aux heures tardives ?  
| A student who visits teachers after hours? |
| II.6 Un professeur qui menace une élève qui refuse ses avances ?  
| A teacher who threatens a student who refuses his advances? |
| II.7 Un professeur qui exerce des pressions sur l’ami(e) d’un(e) élève qui a refusé ses avances ?  
<p>| A teacher who exerts pressure on a student who refused advances? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II.8</td>
<td>A teacher who pressures the friends of a student who refused his advances?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.9</td>
<td>A teacher who uses grades to pressure his student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.10</td>
<td>A student who threatens her teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.11</td>
<td>A student who exchanges « services » for grades with her teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.12</td>
<td>A teacher who sleeps with his student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.13</td>
<td>A teacher who forces his student to sleep with him?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.14</td>
<td>A student who makes advances at her teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.15</td>
<td>A teacher who puts pressure on a student who serves as an intermediary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.16</td>
<td>A teacher who exchanges good grades with students for “rendered services”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.17</td>
<td>A teacher who impregnated a student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.18</td>
<td>A student who was impregnated by her teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.19</td>
<td>A teacher who refused the paternity of his child from a student he impregnated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.20</td>
<td>A teacher who pressured the student to have an abortion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.21</td>
<td>A student who gave birth to the child of a teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.22</td>
<td>A teacher who made a student disappear?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Qui peut harceler qui ?
   Who can harass whom?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III.3.a Une élève peut harceler son professeur.</td>
<td>A student can harass her teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.b Un professeur peut harceler son élève.</td>
<td>A teacher can harass his student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.c Un élève peut harceler une élève.</td>
<td>A student can harass another student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.d Un professeur peut harceler un professeur (femme).</td>
<td>A male teacher can harass a female teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.e Une élève peut harceler un élève.</td>
<td>A female student can harass a male student?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Caractéristiques d’un professeur qui harcèle ses élèves
   Characteristics of a teacher who harasses his students:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vieux/Old</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauvre/Poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riche/Rich</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeune/Young</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marié/Married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitieux/Ambitious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Célibataire/Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beau/Handsome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentil/Nice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Méchant/Mean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bête/Stupid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paresseux/Lazy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Demographic Data Collection

This will be hand written with the use of pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. These pseudonyms attached to other pertinent demographic information will be used in the research if I choose to quote or paraphrase a response.

Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Parental Consent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zénabou</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Célibataire (single)</td>
<td>Musulmane (Muslim)</td>
<td>2nde (10th grade)</td>
<td>Berba</td>
<td>Mother and Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Khadi”</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Berba</td>
<td>M &amp; F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parent/Teacher/Administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Marital Status (married)</th>
<th>Religion (Christian)</th>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Positionality (teacher/parent/etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex. Kami</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Marié</td>
<td>Chrétien</td>
<td>Fon</td>
<td>Prof. au CEG (Secondary School Teacher)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Written Ohio University Adult Participation Consent Form

Title of Research: Perceptions, Conceptualizations and Experiences of Sexual Harassment in Rural Northern Beninois Secondary Schools: A Collective Case Study

Researcher: Kristina Nicole Tamny

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

I served as a Peace Corps volunteer teacher in this community for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. Since coming back to the United States, I have started an International Development Studies Program at Ohio University and become interested in girls’ education and identifying the variety of obstacles young girls face is receiving and education. One of these issues includes sexual harassment in schools between teachers and students. Sexual harassment includes inappropriate comments, behaviors, actions or relationships between teachers and their students. Throughout my service, I witnessed and heard about acts of sexual harassment of female students. Because every year more and more girls are attending school it is important that we make sure schools are safe environments for girls, where they can come to learn. I have come back to Benin to do research for my graduate thesis on students, teachers, and parents experiences and perceptions of sexual harassment in schools. This research is NOT about specific victims or perpetrators of sexual harassment. The purpose of my research is to explore general attitudes, observations or experiences about the phenomenon. I would like to talk to all community members in order to fully understand what the community knows as (or considers to be) sexual harassment, how the community feels about sexual harassment, and what they are doing to protect girls in schools. I will be talking to school administrators, parents, students (with parents’ permission), and teachers about sexual harassment. I will also be speaking to various NGO workers, key community members, and government officials regarding sexual harassment policy, enforcement, and progress since the 2006 law was passed. These interviews will last between 45 minutes and one hour of time. After the initial interview, I will organize one more meeting to confirm that I have correctly understood and recorded the provided information and responses. This follow up interview will be about 20 to 30 minutes in length and may be conducted over the phone depending on logistics. The goal of my research is to write a research paper about perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment in northern Beninois secondary schools. I hope that this research will help the larger goal of creating awareness about sexual harassment, protecting girl students, and creating concrete reporting systems.
**Risks and Discomforts**

I encourage you and all other participants to not tell personal stories or use names of teachers or students. If you use specific names when sharing certain events I may be legally required to report to the local police and/or school administration. Please do not use real names! If at any point you are uncomfortable, emotionally distressed, do not want to respond or would like to leave, let me know immediately and you can withdrawal from the research. I will be staying at the community center and will be available for the duration of my research for any further questions or concerns. Legal, medical and counseling services will not be provided from me.

Would you like information provided by you to remain anonymous?  ___yes  ___no

If you would not like me to use your real name I will use a pseudonym to relay the thoughts or opinions provided by you. Throughout the interview be sure to indicate any information you would like to be kept confidential, off the record, or anonymously cited.

**Benefits**

Overall, I hope to empower girl students and give them a voice to express their concerns and the hidden realities of teacher-student relationships. I will provide all of the participants with a copy of the 2006 Beninois law on Sexual Harassment in schools and contact information for NGOs, government agencies, and law enforcement agencies that provide legal, medical or counseling advice to victims of sexual harassment. Each participant will leave the discussion group or interview with a new awareness about the 2006 law and their rights. I will offer suggestions to interested parents and teachers about reporting system techniques, educational speakers who can visit the school, and projects to deter harassment and increase awareness in the community. This research will add to the lacking literature on girls’ education in Benin, the obstacles girls’ face in obtaining an education and government policy/law enforcement involving sexual harassment in Beninois secondary schools.

**Confidentiality and Records**

I will never reveal the names of participants or details of the information they provided to school officials, the Beninois government or my own government. If I use specific information in my final paper I will use made-up names to tell the story and while the location will be obvious to local residents, I will not indicate where my research was conducted in my final write-up. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

**Contact Information**

If you have any pertinent questions about the research or your rights as a participant you can contact the Director of Research Compliance at Ohio University, Jo Ellen Sherow. Her phone number is 001- 740-593-0664 and her email is Sherow@ohio.edu. Also if you have any questions for me (Kristina Tamny) after I leave my phone number is 001-717-
654-9307 and my email kt122708@ohio.edu. You may also contact my advisor for the research, Dr. Jie-Li Li, and his email is lij@ohio.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature_________________________________________________________ Date_______
Printed_________________________________________________________

Version Date: 04/28/2009
Appendix 5: Demographics of Research Participants

**Student Research Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Salimatou</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kanditcha</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jean-Pierre</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Khadim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sedou</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Benoit</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Francois</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Jean</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Bartheleme</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jacques</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Roger</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Pabo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>5eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Soubi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>6eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Wahabou</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Dominique</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Lamine</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>5eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Henri</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1ere</td>
<td>Wrote 6 page essay on topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Ibrahim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>2nde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Pascaline</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Leticia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td>Wife of teacher, 2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Rita</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>5eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Aminata</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>6eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Kassa</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1ere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Saba</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Yao</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Tle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Brigette</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>6eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Aziz</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Florentine</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2nde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Pinagui</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Rufine</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Christine</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Alice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Jeanne</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4eme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teacher Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Local/Outsider</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. M. André</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Husband of student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. M. Hounssou</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td>Interviewed in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. M. Nagassi</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. M. Gewanou</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. M. Nago</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td>Director of Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. M. Kouanara</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Young, heartthrob, impregnated student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. M. Yangi</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Parent Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Adama</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Agriculturalist</td>
<td>Single mother of 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Madame Gnammi</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>Single mother of 4, sends daughters to boarding school in regional capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. M. Raoul</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Primary School Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. M. Koyiri</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Agriculturist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. M. N’Ouanti</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Cotton co-op director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. M. Hég</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Primary School Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Madame Sambieni</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Assistant Director of social and health services organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Grace</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Retired primary school teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. M. Bernard</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>High-level local politician</td>
<td>Daughter was infected with HIV/AIDS by teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Maria</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Assistant Director of International Development Organization</td>
<td>GAD and Girls’ Education Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>