

'They Are Not Serious Like the Boys': Gender Norms and Contradictions for Girls in Rural Kenya

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Abstract

This paper reconsiders urban–rural and modern–traditional dichotomies by exploring the multiple and contested gendered issues that secondary school girls face in rural Kisii, Western Kenya. Findings are drawn from a qualitative case study and explore the ways that gendered norms interact with new ideas of gender equity in and out of the classroom. It is argued that this rural setting offers a highly complex environment for girls in local day secondary schools who often face multiple challenges; many of which are at risk of being overlooked by assumptions that the rural context, where the girls live and are educated, is timeless, static and isolated. Implications are considered for the reconceptualisation of ideas of gender equity in education to go beyond quantitative measures such as enrolment and parity of attention in class to account for out-of-school challenges and the ways in which girls are treated while in school.

Keywords: Gender; Education; Rurality; Kenya; Teachers; Self-Worth

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