The Interaction Between Girls' Education and Empowerment

A Comparative Study of Participants and Non-Participants in the Girl Up Club in Kampala, Uganda

Kimberly Michelle Wolf

Master of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education, Department for Educational Sciences

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Abstract

In this study, I explore the educational and gendered realities of some adolescent girls in primary schools in an urban slum area in Uganda and examines the possibility of the adolescent girls' club approach to address the shortfalls in formal education in terms of empowering girls with gendered knowledge. As one of the developing countries that has promoted national and international girls' education policies, Uganda provides an ideal country case to explore the interaction between girls' education and empowerment. While more Uganda girls than ever are enrolled in primary school, it is unclear whether a prioritization of educational access has had the intended results in terms of improving the well-being and empowerment of girls. At the same time, adolescent girls' clubs as a form of non-formal education has become an increasing popular approach to girls' empowerment among the international development community. Nonetheless, current scholarship has insufficiently addressed the lived experiences of schoolgirls to examine how they perceive, make meaning of, and navigate the challenges and opportunities presented in their local context, particularly in the adolescent girls' club setting.

A qualitative comparative study was carried out in two primary schools, a non-governmental organization (Girl Up Initiative Uganda), and surrounding communities in Kampala, Uganda. Data was collected over 4.5 months through semi-structured interviews, fieldwork observation, informal discussions, and a review of organizational documents. The researcher compared the perceptions, meaning-making, and identity construction among participants in the Girl Up Club as the intervention group, and non-participants as the control group, The analysis was guided by an inductive thematic analysis and the levels and dimensions of empowerment theory.

The main findings indicate that generational poverty affects girls' access to formal education and feelings of empowerment and thus, it must be addressed in Uganda's educational policy. Spatial perceptions and experiences of gender inequality were also found amongst all the girls, yet only the girls in the intervention group expressed a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic and political gender power dynamics that led to such disparities. Girls' understanding of the concept of 'empowerment' was more apparent among the intervention group and while they provided varying meanings there was a common focus on individual psychological empowerment. The researcher also found that non-formal education has the potential to develop empowerment and that equally empowerment can lead to improved school performance, illustrating a dynamic interaction between education and empowerment.

Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

AGP	Adolescent Girls' Program
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DFID	Department for International Development
EFA	Education for All
ELA	Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents
FAWEU	Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GEM	Girls Education Movement
GoU	Government of Uganda
GUIU	Girl Up Initiative Uganda
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
IKS	Indigenous knowledge systems
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSGE	National Strategy on Girls' Education
PFA	Beijing Platform for Action
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SWAGAA	Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The early 1990s marked the beginning of girls' education being placed in the center of the international development agenda with the establishment of the Education for All (EFA) goals and targets together with the World Bank's 1995 statement of priorities with girl's basic education as the first priority (Heward, 1999; King & Winthrop, 2015; Unterhalter, 2007). From the World Bank's international development perspective girls' education was a policy that could reduce poverty by lowering fertility, improving child health, and raising women's income (Heward, 1999). Simultaneously, the launch of the EFA during the 1990 Conference in Jomtien included some of the first signals that "education of girls was important for a global social justice project" (Unterhalter, 2007, p. 11). "For the first time, the education of girls was at the top of the agenda for donor agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations" (Heward, 1999, p. 1). For the past two decades, this trend to promote girls' education has continued and gained strength as a response to the socio-cultural challenges facing adolescent girls in resource-poor settings (Marcus & Page, 2014). Girls' schooling has become the answer to many development problems, as articulated in heavily funded bilateral programs such as DFID's Girls' education challenge, and USAID's program on ending child marriage (Unterhalter, 2014).

In response to this international pressure and prospects for external funding, combined with the growing women's rights movements globally, national policymakers in many sub-Saharan African countries have integrated the specific needs and issues of gender parity into national educational plans. Uganda was chosen as the site for this study given that it has illustrated strong governmental commitment to education for all children. Uganda was one of the first African countries to introduce Universal Primary Education (UPE) and in the process many schools were built and teachers trained (Mpyangu et al., 2014). In addition, Uganda is a signatory to several international conventions and declarations that aim to eradicate gender inequalities in education such as The Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Education For All (EFA) Goals, The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) (MoES, 2013), and more recently The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (MoES, 2018). At the national level, Uganda's commitment to girls' education is

reflected in the constitution (1995) as well as the Gender in Education Policy (2009) and the National Development Plan (2010). As a result, there has been an increase in the number of girls accessing education at the level of entry, particularly for primary schooling which has almost reached the 50/50 mark (MoEs, 2013).

Despite these successes, challenges persist for girls in school including: sexual abuse and harassment, teenage pregnancy, lack of girl-friendly school environments, low value attached to girls' education, lack of role models, and more. The Ministry of Education and Sports (2013a) found that "the school system remains a dominant source of gender bias and stereotyping…and as a result the schools are largely unable to provide a gender responsive environment" (p. 16). Without a gender-responsive environment, formal schooling is not equipped to foster social change related to gender transformation and girls' empowerment (Stromquist, 2015b). Therefore, it becomes evident that gender equity within education is more than about increasing access to schooling; it entails the cultivation of the capabilities and empowerment necessary for girls to participate fully, actively, and equally in all aspects of their communities and societies (Jones, 2011).

To address these limitations of the formal school setting, the formation of adolescent girls' clubs (AGC) as a form of non-formal education has become an increasingly popular approach among international development and local non-governmental organization (NGO) actors to promote adolescent girls' wellbeing (Marcus, 2015). The adolescent girls' club model has become a widely-used group-based, non-formal educational approach used by NGOs at the local, national and international level to empower girls' outside of formal schooling. Many existing and newly established international, national and local actors are working to promote girls' education through the AGC program approach since girl-centered programming has been recognized as a critical strategy for both pragmatic and principled reasons (Warner et al., 2014). Given the wide range of methods used by different actors in implementing the adolescent girls' club, there is no agreement on the most effective design and delivery model (Marcus, 2015).

There is a gap in existing literature that explores exactly if and how the adolescent girls' club model empowers girls, and if so, how the empowerment process leads to changes in attitudes, behaviors, and practices (Warner et al., 2014). The dearth of evidence from the sub-Saharan region on the adolescent girls' club model, despite the popularity of the approach, underscores the importance of more research in the field (Baric et al., 2009; Marcus, 2015). The comparative nature of this study allows a closer exploration of how and if so, to what extent,

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the adolescent girls' club method increases perceptions, feelings, and experiences of empowerment at the individual, relational, and collective level. Furthermore, despite the wide use of the concept 'empowerment' in the international development sector, there are few studies that explore how girls themselves understand the concept.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to filling the knowledge gap on the adolescent girls' club approach as a form of non-formal education in a critical time when girls' education and empowerment is gaining more attention and becoming more mainstream. In the case of Uganda, as with other low income African countries, it is vital to understand how all aspects of a girl's life intersect with her academic experience and overall well-being, and the possibility of the adolescent girls' club method to create the space for girls to begin to challenge pervasive negative gender norms. In this study, the researcher acknowledges the need to give voice to adolescent girls themselves to deepen an understanding of what education and empowerment means to them, their unique challenges, and what the adolescent girls' club has contributed to in their personal and academic lives.

The study is a qualitative comparative study that was carried out in two UPE schools and their surrounding communities in the Nakawa Division of Kampala, Uganda. It also includes participant observations during my time working with the local NGO Girl Up Initiative Uganda (GUIU) that implements the intervention under study- the Girl Up Club[1], an adolescent girls' school-based club that has served 1,460 adolescent girls. One school was chosen as the control school, where none of the participants benefited from the Girl Up Club, and the other school was the intervention school, where the Girl Up Club is active and GUIU has a strong presence. To provide rich information about their experiences as adolescent girls in school and in the Girl Up Club (for the intervention group), the interviews of adolescent girls form the primary set of data, which is combined with information from informal conversations with teachers and GUIU staff members and a review of supplementary documents from GUIU.

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[1] The Girl Up Club is one aspect of the Adolescent Girls Program (AGP), however, for the purpose and ease of this study, the Girl Up Club will be used.

To achieve the overall purpose of understanding the educational and gendered realities for girls in primary school and to examine how, if at all, participants of the Girl Up Clubs have benefited from the program, the following research questions guided the study:

1) What meanings do adolescent girls attach to being enrolled in school?
    a) How, if at all, are gender differences and inequalities constructed and perpetuated in the school environment?
2) How is the concept of 'empowerment' perceived by adolescent girls?
    a) What is the link, if any, between education and empowerment?
    b) Through what processes do adolescent girls individually, relationally, and collectively experience empowerment?
3) How do adolescent girls experience participation in the Girl Up Club?
    a) To what extent do girls construct new gendered meanings and identities after completing the program?

For the purpose of this study, I employed a feminist analytical framework based on the concept of 'empowerment' to investigate the interaction between educational attainment and empowerment for adolescent girls. I have merged the theories of two key feminist thinkers on this topic: Nelly Stromquist and Naila Kabeer, to create a model that illustrates the levels and dimensions of girls' empowerment, which was used to interpret the findings.

1.3 Structure of the Study

The study is organized into six chapters. **Chapter one** introduces the problem that the study aims to explore together with more information on the research aim and questions. **Chapter two** provides contextual information and previous studies on girls' education in Uganda. In **Chapter three**, the analytical framework centered around the concept of 'empowerment' in education is presented. **Chapter four** focuses on the research design employed including more details on the data collection, sampling, research site, ethics, and limitations of the findings. In **Chapter five**, the main findings from the research are presented and divided between the control and intervention group. This chapter also includes an analysis and discussion of the findings in relation to the analytical framework and wider discussions around empowerment in relation to girls' education. The final chapter, **Chapter six**, provides concluding remarks and recommendations for further research.

2 Adolescent Girls' Education and Empowerment

2.1 Adolescent Girls' Education Policies

Adolescent girls' education policies in Uganda have highlighted a national commitment to girls' education. National policies have been highly impacted and influenced by the shifts in the country's political and economic frameworks combined with the priorities and agendas set by international actors. As the Minister of Education and Sports (MoES) explained "the promotion of girls' education has been on the agenda of the government of Uganda for the last two decades" (2013, p. 3). In parallel to domestic shifts to promote the education of girls, international organizations have supported investment in girls' education under the argument that it contributes to the overall economic advancement of the developing world (World Bank, 2012). Uganda's educational policies have been closely in line with international best practices (Swift & Gena, 2013) that reflect the dominance of external agendas driven by international donors (Tikly & Barrett, 2013) of which the Ugandan government is highly reliant on for educational funding. In the following section, I will discuss the global and national educational policies around girls' education to contextualize the study.

2.1.1 International Adolescent Girls' Education Policies

Policy-making around adolescent girls' education in Uganda has been heavily impacted and influenced by global goals and priorities. International emphasis on girls' education has been largely based on an economic analysis related to curbing fertility and population growth (Brock-Utne, 2000). This popular viewpoint is based on the argument that an educated girl is less likely to have more children and is equipped with the knowledge and tools to escape the cycle of generational poverty and enter the formal labor market. On its website, the World Bank (2018) exemplifies this reasoning:

> Girls' education is a strategic development priority. Better educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labor market, earn higher incomes, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and enable better health care and education for their children, should they choose to become mothers. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and nations out of poverty.

Heward (1997) claims that in developing countries girls' schooling is being used as a contraceptive. However, in her study of fertility and education in thirty-eight countries, Heward (1997) finds that education appears to only reduce fertility rates in highly developed countries with more egalitarian gender regimes. A woman must live in a gender equal society and experience autonomy in every aspect of her life if she is to have control over her fertility choices, irrespective of her educational attainment. As Brock-Utne (2000) contends, "there are good reasons to ensure that girls are educated…but the arguments for doing so should have to do with fairness, equity, and securing the best talents in important jobs rather than with having women give birth to fewer babies" (p. 14).

Whether girls' education is viewed as an intrinsic right or leading to extrinsic outcomes, over the past two decades girls' education has been an international development priority since the 1990s with the establishment of the Education for All (EFA) goals (King & Winthrop, 2015) and changing priorities within international organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, and UNICEF (Heward, 1999). The decade opened with the EFA Conference in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand as an international education initiative to bring the benefits of education to every citizen in every society. The conference gave disproportionate focus on formal primary schooling (Hoppers, 1998), particularly related to bridging the gap in educational outcomes between girls and boys. EFA included some of the first signals that "education of girls was important for a global social justice project" (Unterhalter, 2007, p. 11). The EFA campaign also prompted developing countries, including Uganda, to develop policies aimed at assuring girls' full and equitable access to and achievement of basic education (Kabesiime, 2010).

To reach this goal, a combination of stakeholders including national governments, NGOs, and international development agencies committed to achieving six specific educational goals (Oonyu, 2012). In particular, EFA Goals 2 and 5 focus on eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education:

- Goal 2- Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Goal 5- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality (UNESCO, 2015, p. 164).

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Gender equity in education was also embodied in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2 and 3, and more recently in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5, which are dedicated respectively to meeting universal primary schooling for all children, and ending gender inequalities in education. For this study, I will borrow the term 'global gender goals' from Holmarsdottir, Ekne and Augestad (2011) to refer to the global consensus on what works to reach gender equality within education, given that the theme of gender is central in the EFA, MDGs, and other global development agendas.

Together with the UN Global Goals, Goal 2 and 5 of the EFA agenda focused international attention on eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education (UNESCO, 2015). With the creation of these global gender goals, the majority of education ministers in the developing world and international leaders illustrated their recognition of the importance of girls' education as national and global priorities (King & Winthrop, 2015). In these global gender goals, providing girls with equal access to education was hailed as an unequivocal social good. Education here was viewed as formal education, which is itself a global phenomenon, and became the model of education endorsed as one of the keys to development (Harber, 2014).

As a signatory to these international conventions, declarations, and global gender goals and as a recipient of bilateral and international funds for girls' education, Uganda has fully ascribed to the global focus on girls' education in terms of access and participation in formal primary schooling. In the MoES's report it illustrates how it measures its success in closing the gender gap in primary school: "Uganda has made significant progress in promoting girls education…there has been an increase in the number of girls accessing education, at the level of entry, particularly for primary schooling which is almost reaching the 50/50 mark" (2013, p. 10). Figure 2.1 accompanies this statement, however, the figure illustrates that the primary school net enrollment ratios for girls since 2001 has fluctuated, but not increased. Interestingly, the reason for the progress towards gender parity in primary schooling is due to the fact that boys' school net enrollment has decreased significantly from 2001 to 2009.

Figure 2.1: Percentage primary school net enrollment ratios since 2001 (Source: MoEs, 2013)
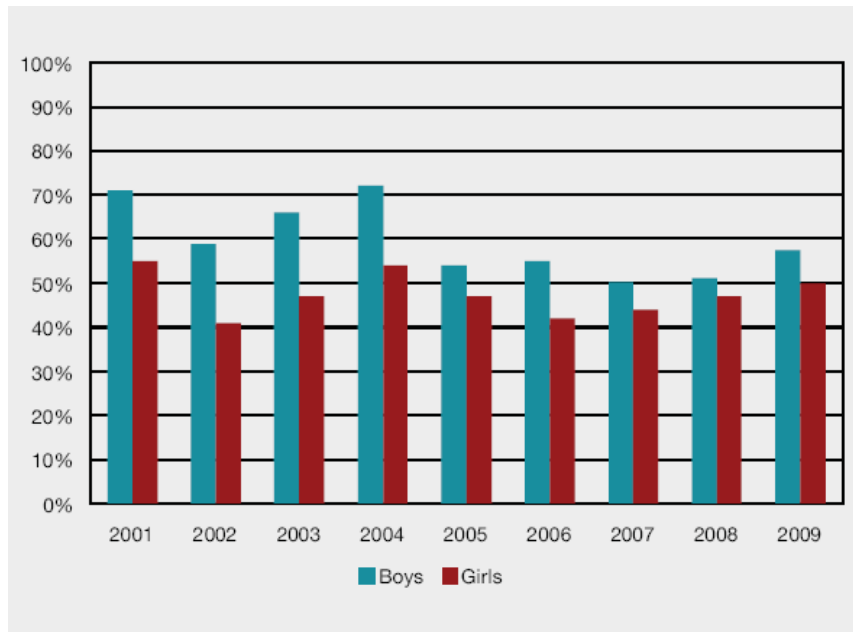
Even so, the graph suggests steady progress towards gender equity at the primary level. While more girls are going to primary school and gender equality has nearly been achieved in enrollments at this level, girls' completion rates continue to lag slightly behind those of boys, with the gap widening as they advance along the educational cycle. Fewer than half (46.6%) of all girls enroll in secondary school (compared with 53.4% of boys), and only a third of those (34%) complete their education at this level (compared with 52% for boys) (MoES, 2012). According to 2012/2013 statistics, almost a third (31%) of the girls who drop out of school do so because of marriage, and almost a quarter (21%) because of pregnancy (UBOS, 2014).

Gender parity has been primarily equated with girls' enrollment in primary school. According to Figure 2.1, Uganda is close to reaching gender equity at the primary level. However, one must be cautioned against a narrow preoccupation with the quantitative aspects of gender in education – measuring gender parity at the primary level. While we have significant knowledge on educational access and retention for girls, Holmarsdottir et al. (2011) find that there are "few studies that have taken a more in-depth qualitative approach to examining the local realities of the school environment, the community or the girls themselves, with a focus on empowerment in education" (p. 15). It is crucial, therefore, to understand how the global gender goals are understood, translated, and implemented nationally and locally among various actors. At the same time, as Stromquist (2015a) claims "despite constant discourse on the crucial role of education, governmental responses are usually characterized by limited objectives (centering

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mostly on gender parity in access to basic education) and even weaker implementation" (p. 60). Therefore, it is important to first offer a brief background on Uganda's internal domestic political and economic landscape and how this impacts national policies on girls' education that simultaneously strive to align with the global gender goals.

2.1.2 Adolescent Girls' Education Policies in Uganda

Kabesiime (2010) delineates the domestic political and economic periods as the following: the Post-Independence Period (1962-1970), the Economic/Political Crisis (1971-1985), and the Economic Recovery Period (1986-2006)[2]. Within each period a specific approach was adopted towards girls' education that was closely related to the larger socio-economic and political transitions. The first period after Uganda gained independence in 1962 was marked by strong class divisions as the schools mainly benefited children of administrators and chiefs. Even though the government began to realize the importance of educating girls in relation to reducing social problems and contributing to the nation's economic development, education only benefited girls of administrators and chiefs around urban areas (Kabesiime, 2010). Nevertheless, a focus on gender parity in education was first laid out in 1963 in the Castle Commission, which argued that gender disparity in education was a broad-based issue that must be handled from socio-economic, political, and cultural points of view (Kabesiime, 2010).

In the second period, due to political instability and internal conflict, the reduction in government resource allocation to the education sector, together with rampant corruption, led to the closing of many schools and for those that survived, a serious lack in school resources (Kabesiime, 2010). Therefore, the government refocused its attention to recovery and rehabilitation of educational facilities rather than addressing gender disparities (Muhwezi, 2003). This was not an ideal time for the improvement of girls' educational gains (Kabesiime, 2010). In 1986, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came into power and since then Uganda has experienced a period of relative peace and stability.

During the Economic Recovery Period, there was an increased focus on girls' education for two main reasons: to promote national economic development as envisioned in Uganda's Vision 2040 to transition the country from a low-income to a upper middle-income country by

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[2] I will extend 'the Economic Recovery Period' to the current period that is marked by a preoccupation with economic growth.

2040, and to align its national educational systems and policies with the Education for All (EFA) Goals and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Agenda 2030).

The first reason is based on the idea that in order to foster economic development and be a competitive international economy, Uganda needs to increase its human capital and skilled labor force. In other words, "in this aspiration, sustainable human resource is the single most important factor" (MoES, 2018, pg. 1). Uganda has an estimated population of 34.6 million with 33 percent of the population comprised of young people below the age of 19 years. As written in the Ministry of Education and Sports most recent *National Sexuality Education Framework (2018)*, "this youthful population is a potential opportunity and asset for driving, accelerating and sustaining economic growth and transformation envisaged in the national vision" (p. 1). This necessitated the expansion of girls' education to meet national new economic demands as Uganda seeks to improve its place in the world economic order (Kabesiime, 2010).

To adopt and localize the SDGs, Uganda has transitioned into the Second National Development Plan (2015/16- 2019/20), which employs a human capital approach to girls' education. The plan "identifies human capital development as one of the key fundamentals that need to be strengthened to accelerate the country's transformation and harnessing of the demographic dividend" (GoU, 2015, p. 125). Girls' education is mentioned here in regards to including "specific interventions for the girl child" and the "implementation of the National Strategy for Girls Education (2014)" in the primary schooling cycle (GoU, 2015, p. 126).

During the five-year period of the plan, the Education and Sports sector aims to pursue three main objectives to "achieve equitable access to relevant and quality education and training". Interventions listed under this objective that specifically target the educational needs of the girls include:

- Develop and implement programmes that ensure a safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environment in schools.
- Design and implement a partnership framework to address social-cultural and other barriers to girls' and boys' attendance and retention in school.
- Enforce laws against defilement at school level. This will require formulating by-laws and ordinances at district level.
- Provide gender sensitive sanitation facilities that would address special needs of girls and boys (GoU, 2015, p. 196).

Beyond the inclusion of girls' education interventions in the Second National Development Plan, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has taken a lead on establishing national policies and frameworks to address gender inequalities in educational attainment. The MoES, in collaboration with the Government of Uganda and international organizations, has developed the following educational policies to promote gender parity in education[3]:

- Universal Primary Education (UPE) that was launched in 1997 to make primary education accessible to all children (boys and girls),
- The 1990 Affirmative Action measure to award 1.5 bonus points in the calculation of tertiary entrance scores for female applicants,
- The National Strategy for Girls Education (NSGE) to serve as a master strategy plan for all stakeholders working in girls' education,
- The Promotion of Girls Education (PGE) scheme aiming to improve girls' retention and performance in 1000 primary schools, and
- The Equity in the Classroom (EIC) program (funded by USAID) to provide technical assistance and teacher training workshops to increase girls' classroom participation and completion of primary school (Kabesiime, 2010).

Given its prominence as the "master strategy plan", I will discuss the National Strategy on Girls Education (NSGE) in more detail below.

2.1.3 The National Strategy on Girls Education

In 2004, Ugandan policy-makers drafted the first version of the NSGE with the aim to develop concrete plans on girls' education as laid out in the Education Sector Investment Plan (1997-2003). Besides being based on the Education Sector Investment Plan, the NSGE was developed in line with the Government White Paper on Education 1992, the 1995 Constitution as well as global commitments to eradicate gender inequalities in education, such as The Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Education For All (EFA) Goals, The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) (MoES, 2013).

The document aims to provide information on the current context of girls' education and lay out the goals, strategic objectives, interventions, and a framework for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The overarching goal of the NSGE is to "promote girls' education

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[3] This is not an exhaustive list of government programs.

as an integral part of efforts to create gender equity and equality in the education system in Uganda" (MoES, 2013, p. 17).

The discourse around girls' education in the NSGE is closely aligned to international education policies and goals. Uganda's education policy, similar to many of its other government policies, is in line with international best practice (Swift & Gena, 2013). Uganda prides itself in being a signatory to international law, policies, and goals and in the field of education policy this is no different. Throughout the NSGE policy document, it is explicit about the influence of international EFA gender goals on the revised version of the policy. In the forward section of the NSGE, the Minister of the Education and Sports writes "over the years, a number of emerging issues have been identified that prompted the revision of the strategy in 2013. These include among others; the renewed emphasis on girls' education, both nationally and internationally" (MoES, 2013, p. 3).

The NSGE also includes many references to the dominant discourse of human capital thinking by viewing girls' education as an investment in the country's economic development. In this view, girls are valued for forming the basis of a new workforce. The policy is open about the human capital potential of girls' education. In the opening of the NSGE (MoES, 2013), the Minister calls girls 'Uganda's vital human resource' (p. 3) and the UN Resident Coordinator explains that "a girl's education directly contributes to sustainable development and it is one of the most important investments that yields maximum returns for development" (p. 4). The discourse and language used clearly articulates how the Ugandan government views the education of girls as an 'investment' that 'yields results'.

In 2013, the NSGE was revised to respond to the "emerging concerns in Uganda's education sector in general and in girls' education in particular" (MoES, 2013, p. 8). Beyond the reasoning for girls' education, the NSGE acknowledges the persistent barriers to girls' full realization of a quality and relevant education, which includes:

- Gap between policy and practice
- Persistent gender gaps at critical point of education access
- Persistence of low value attached to girls' education
- Sexual abuse of girls
- Early sexual engagement
- Teenage pregnancy
- Lack of child-friendly school environment
- Inadequate life skills training

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- Inadequate gender capacities among key actors (MoES, 2013, pg. 13-16)

As an educational policy document the NSGE provides a holistic framework in which to consider girls' education (Jones, 2011). It addresses the most pressing barriers to girls' full and equal participation in education in Uganda, clustered into a wide range of sociocultural, economic and political factors (MoES, 2013). It also acknowledges the importance of cultivating girls' self-confidence, autonomy and leadership skills and outlines strategies/activities to address the identified challenges (Jones, 2011).

In 2011, Jones conducted a longitudinal, ethnographic policy research case study with 15 Ugandan schoolgirls in rural Masaka District to explore the girls' educational experiences in relation to the policies outlined in the NSGE. She employed Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework to evaluate the NSGE in terms of the extent to which its interventions are empowering for schoolgirls. One area that was excluded from the NSGE is the issues and challenges related to menstruation. Jones explains that "the lack of focused attention given to menstruation is a serious shortcoming in the NSGE, given that many girls miss up to 25% of their schooling due to problems associated with menstruation" (p. 396).

Jones' (2011) other main finding was that despite its acknowledgement of the barriers to girls' education

> …the NSGE has not made much progress towards achieving its goal of 'remov[ing] the numerous barriers which prevent our female children from achieving their full potential as equal citizens of their country'…There are many shortcomings, including a lack of co-ordination on the part of all the parties supporting and implementing these initiatives, insufficient geographical coverage, deficiencies in monitoring, evaluation and enforcement, and the dependency on donors for many of the initiatives (p. 408).

Jones (2011) found that the NSGE did not have the necessary political backing to ensure that the barriers to girls' education received the serious attention at all levels of educational programming, planning, and policy-making. As Seel and Gibbard (2000) argue, "the NSGE seems more an advocacy rather than a strategic document" (p. 29).

Thus, the 'significant progress' made in relation to girls' access to primary school is overshadowed by the persistent challenges faced by schoolgirls in Uganda. As Kabesiime (2010) proclaims "education policies in Uganda are in a crisis" given that they do not adequately address and respond to the major factors affecting girls' access to and retention in schooling. While gender parity in primary education enrollment has been met, there remain

high levels of school dropout rates at both the primary and secondary level. In their "Out of School Children Study in Uganda", Mpyangu, Ochen, Onyango, and Lubaale (2014) found that financial constraints were the most prominent factor explaining high dropout rates with approximately 81 percent of sampled households stating that lack of money was the reason why their children dropped out of school. This is supported by Kabesiime (2010) who found that "the monetary costs of schooling continue to lead reasons for dropout even with Universal Primary Education" (p. 341).

Even though Uganda was one of the first African countries to introduce Universal Primary education (UPE) in 1997 and abolish tuition fees, the reintroduction of school fees has undermined universal access to education (Brock-Utne, 2000). In a report by the Office of the Prime Minister (2016), it states that "UPE provides for 'free' education to all primary school-going age children (6-13 year old) in Uganda on a cost-sharing arrangement whereby parents are expected to provide exercise books, pens, uniforms plus lunch" (p. 1). However, many parents are forced to pay school fees each term, putting question to whether "cost-sharing" is just another way to reintroduce school fees.

Given that schooling remains to be costly in most of the world, household wealth has been found to be strongly associated with access to education (Lewin & Sabates, 2012; UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2012). Lewin and Sabates (2012) found in their study of six Sub-Saharan African countries, including Uganda, that "children living in the poorest households continue to experience a greater likelihood of not being in school relative to children from the richest households" (p. 521). Furthermore, difficulty in paying school fees has become a gender issue as well as a class issue. Proclamations of gender equity in educational opportunities are "of little value if the reintroduction of school fees forces parents to choose whether the little money available will be used for educating a boy or a girl" (Brock-Utne, 2000, p. 28). Sumra and Katunzi (1991), here taken from Brock-Utne (2000, p.2 7) found in Tanzania that the re-introduction of school fees in secondary schools affected girls more than boys, and girls from the middle and lower classes more than girls from upper classes. The sexual division of domestic labor is of fundamental importance as girls in poor homes conduct the bulk of domestic chores and parents perceive school knowledge as moving their daughters away from essential tasks in the home (Stromquist, 2001).

While gender parity in primary school attainment has been achieved for the richest girls, the poorest girls still lag far behind the poorest boys (UNESCO, 2015). Therefore, it is the poorest

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girls that feel the double brunt of poverty and gender inequality. Even though this study is primarily focused on the gender dimension of education and the educational challenges girls' face, it is impossible to ignore the intersection of poverty and economic class as a defining aspect of a girl's life, which impacts her educational attainment and achievement.

2.2 Adolescent Girls' Club Model

In global education policy papers, it is often argued that good quality education helps boost the confidence of girls (UNGEI, 2015), however it leaves out the critical point that formal educational spaces can also be disempowering and unsafe spaces, and that there is not necessarily a causal connection between girls' access to education and improved self-confidence. Holmarsdottir et al. (2011) found in their qualitative study of schoolgirls in South Sudan and South Africa, that "empowerment is not necessarily an automatic outcome of education, with the individual stories providing a more nuanced picture of the possibilities and challenges in education" (p. 24). Similarly, Stromquist (2002) explains, connecting the term empowerment to participation in the formal schooling system "is problematic because it assumes that the experience and knowledge attained in schooling automatically prepares girls to assess their worth and envisage new possibilities" (p. 24). It leaves out an engagement with aspects of schooling that tend to reproduce a patriarchal social order and thus the knowledge gained tends to affirm the unequal and inequitable status quo of women and girls (Stromquist, 2013).

Furthermore, there is growing evidence that formal school spaces, rather than being enabling environments, may be unsafe places marked by sexual abuse and violence for girls (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2013; Manzini-Henwood et al., 2015, Mirembe & Davies, 2001; Muhanguzi, 2011). As Mirembe and Davies (2001) found from their ethnographic study with students at a secondary school in Uganda, sexual harassment was a common practice and largely ignored, leading to the conclusion that "a disregard or normalization of sexual harassment further legitimizes acceptance of male power" (p. 410). Teachers and school peers may perpetuate violence, and girls may be at increased risk for violence when traveling to and from school (Dunne et al., 2006).

Thus, if schooling is to be an 'empowering education' it must empower girls from a gender perspective by enabling girls to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to counter gendered stereotypes and conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Stromquist, 2002). Given

the conservative nature of most formal schooling settings, "it is within nonformal education settings that most gender-transforming processes have occurred and will likely occur" (Stromquist, 2013, p. 175). Therefore, the following section investigates the history of the adolescent girls' club model in Uganda and globally as an approach to empower girls through non-formal educational means.

2.2.1 The Adolescent Girls' Club Model in Uganda

In Uganda, the adolescent girls' club model has gained national prominence as an effective non-formal education program for more than a decade. President Yoweri Musevini launched the Girls Education Movement (GEM) in 2001 that began as a collaborative initiative with UNICEF, MoES, and FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) Uganda (FAWEU, 2017). GEM's goal is "to empower girls as this is the best way to strengthen and accelerate positive transformation in Africa" (South African Girl Child Alliance/GEM, 2002, p. 8) so that it reaches beyond the borders of Uganda to reach girls throughout Africa. GEM was first implemented in Uganda by FAWEU in 2001 until GEM became an independent NGO in 2011 with support from United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI, 2012). A main program of GEM is the in-school GEM clubs to promote girls' retention in school and sensitize the school community on the benefits of girls' education through posters and writings (Swift & Gena, 2013). GEM clubs had been introduced in 30 percent of the primary schools in 14 districts, thus, it has reasonably good country coverage (Swift & Gena, 2013).

Most significantly for this study, GEM clubs have moved the discussion of girls' education in Uganda from issues of access to issues of empowerment (UNGEI, 2012). Even though there is limited data on the effectiveness and impact of the GEM program in its over two decades of existence, this program offers us a glimpse into the history of school clubs in Uganda, particularly related to girls' education and empowerment.

Uganda has a long history of the club approach, for both in and out of school youth, as a form of non-formal education. In the wake of the AIDS epidemic in Uganda, school-based HIV/AIDS clubs became common as a method to complement other HIV/AIDS educational programs. In their research on HIV/AIDS clubs in Uganda within the peer education model, Norton and Mutonyi (2007) conducted qualitative research with four secondary schools in eastern Uganda where HIV/AIDS clubs operated. While the primary mission of the clubs was educational, the research found that there were additional unintended positive achievements

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for members of the club. Most importantly for this study, Norton and Mutonyi (2007) found that "HIV/AIDS clubs give female students the opportunity to develop skills as leaders…young women were eager to become more active in their schools and communities" (p. 488). The female students were passionate about their membership and commitment to the club, which allowed them the space to be recognized as leaders in their schools and communities and to stand up for their rights.

Another report assessed the relationship between the empowerment of adolescent refugee girls and the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in a refugee settlement in southwestern Uganda (Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013). The data was collected through structured surveys and discussions with 212 adolescent girls. Among its key findings was that girls are concerned about a range of issues affecting their lives including: physical insecurity, barriers to education, limited peer and social support, poverty and overwork, and an inability to meet their basic needs. In relation to the link between the notion of girls' empowerment and the prevention of GBV, the study reports that:

> Girls also emphasize that lack of personal, individual empowerment plays a role in their exposure to GBV. Although they are not using the word empowerment, many girls say they lack life skills that they feel would help them better protect themselves. Many feel they need to be bolder and more assertive about saying no to unwanted advances (p. 12).

The research finds that all girls indicated strong desires for more control over their own lives and an increased ability to care for themselves and others. Their visions also often reflected role models they know and/or wish they had in their lives (Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013).

Additionally, the concept of creating a safe space for girls is emphasized throughout the report as the girls interviewed requested increased opportunities for socializing, networking and organizing amongst themselves. The data illustrated that "girls are interested in a range of activities, most attend religious services, sing and play sports, but few are accessing youth-targeted programming within the settlement or school-based clubs" (Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013, p. 9). Many of the girls are too exhausted and preoccupied with household chores and trying to get to school to connect with other girls or participate in youth programs (Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013). This speaks to the limited opportunities for girls to access spaces for social interaction and to form social networks.

The study concludes with a list of recommendations from the girls for themselves, for donors,

and for service providers and refugee organizations. When asked to think of ways that they could improve their own well-being, achieve their goals and protect themselves from GBV, the girls suggested "building relationships with other girls" by meeting regularly in groups to socialize, share challenges and offer support to one another (Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013, p. 15). They recommended that service providers and refugee organizations assist by supporting "girls' protection and empowerment through increasing their access to social assets" and by "increasing girls' access to youth-led and youth-serving organizations and support girls' groups" (Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013, p. 16). By supporting girls-only clubs, girls would have access to protective assets and safe spaces for social interactions with their peers. It would also create the conditions for taking on leadership roles in the community.

The participation of girls in life skills non-formal education programs is also emphasized in the research. The girls recommended for themselves that they build strong life skills, which includes among others, developing "healthy relationships with those around you, including with parents, teachers and other girls, to win their support and friendships so that they can become your ally and resource when you need help" (Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013, p. 14). Along the same lines, the girls recommended that service providers and refugee organizations increase the participation of adolescent girls in non-formal education programs that would offer access to training in life skills, decision-making, critical thinking, communication and negotiation.

Even though the researchers did not use the word 'adolescent girls' club', the main findings reflect the defining elements of the adolescent girls' club model: the creation of a girls-only space, importance of role models, and integration of life skills training. Most importantly, the report reiterates the critical need for programs to address "weak peer support among girls [that] undermines their ability to take advantage and create opportunities for improving their lives" (Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013, p. 14) and which can be rectified through the implementation of the adolescent girls' club approach.

2.2.2 Adolescent Girls' Club Model in International Programming

Programming through the adolescent girls' clubs has become an increasingly popular non-formal education model among international development actors to promote adolescent girls' wellbeing and empowerment (Marcus, 2015). The club approach is not unique to the Uganda context. Globally, the adolescent girls' club model has become a widely-used group-based, non-formal educational approach used by NGOs at the local, national and international level

to empower girls' outside of formal schooling. Adolescent girls' clubs are designed and implemented in various ways, however, most of them involve an older mentor/trainer meeting with a group of adolescent girls (in-school and/or out-of-school) daily, weekly, or monthly in community or school spaces (Marcus, 2015). The club space becomes a safe space for girls to learn, discuss different issues, and access support. Topics that are covered range from life skills to leadership skills and vocational training. Given the wide range of approaches used by different actors in implementing the adolescent girls' club, there is no agreement on the most effective delivery approach.

Organizations ranging from large international actors such as BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities) and CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere), to national and local organizations such as Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA) and Girl Up Initiative Uganda (GUIU) have utilized the adolescent girls' approach in its programmatic work to varying ends. While some organizations are concerned mainly with the connection between girls' empowerment and economic independence, such as BRAC (Bandeira et al., 2012), other organizations such SWAGAA focus on the link between girls' empowerment and a reduction in cases of sexual violence (Manzini-Henwood et al., 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the meanings and uses connected to the adolescent girls' club approach and girls' empowerment as outlined by the different actors.

Firstly, international organizations operating in Uganda, such as BRAC [4], have utilized the club approach to "simultaneously tackle the economic and health challenges faced by adolescent girls in Uganda" through the provision of life skills and vocational skills training (Bandiera et al., 2012, p. 4). BRAC's intervention, the Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) program, targeted adolescent girls between the ages of 14 and 20, including those that are enrolled in school, others who have graduated from secondary school, and others who have dropped out. It operates through what it calls 'adolescent development clubs' that are open five afternoons per week with activities run by a female mentor.

Bandiera et al. (2012) evaluated the effectiveness of the program using a randomized control trial design by comparing outcomes for adolescent girls in 100 treatment communities and 50

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[4] BRAC is an unusual international actor in the girls' education and empowerment field in Uganda, since the organization is best known for its activities in providing microfinance in Bangladesh (Bandiera, et al., 2012). BRAC launched BRAC Uganda in 2006, which is now the site of "BRAC's largest and fastest scale-up in Africa" with programs that range from microfinance and agriculture to health, education, and youth empowerment (BRAC Uganda, n.d.).

control communities. The evaluation aimed to assess the impact of the program along the following dimensions: 1) health-related knowledge and risky behaviors; 2) engagement in income generating activities; and 3) welfare, self-confidence and empowerment. The study found that the intervention was successful in delaying marriage and childbirth, improving HIV and pregnancy-related knowledge, increasing engagement in self-employment, and improving gender empowerment. As a result of these findings, the researchers concluded that "combined interventions might be more effective among adolescent girls than single-pronged interventions aiming to change risky behaviors solely through related education programmes, or to improve labor market outcomes solely through vocational training" (Bandiera et al., 2012, p. 1).

While the ELA program used the adolescent girls' club method in order to reach its programmatic goals to reduce risky sexual behavior and improve economic independence, other local and international organizations have designed adolescent girls' club programs with the aim of reducing cases of GBV, preventing child marriage, and promoting the development of girls' leadership skills. The following studies will illuminate these various programmatic approaches.

Manzini-Henwood et al. (2015) conducted a study on the effectiveness of the school-based club intervention as a means of addressing cases of GBV in Swaziland, where nearly half (48%) of girls aged 13-24 years have reported experiencing some form of sexual violence. The study assessed the effectiveness of a 12-month girls' empowerment intervention run by a local organization, the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA). The implementation of the program included a three-day training of 15 female mentors who were responsible for the running of the weekly girls' clubs, which consisted of around 20 girls aged 16 and above. Results from the quantitative study illustrate that the club was effective in increasing girls' awareness and positively changing their attitudes towards and potential practices against GBV.

Malhotra et al. (2011) produced a comprehensive report for the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), "Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows," that reviewed the evaluations of 23 child marriage prevention programs. The authors described the link between child marriage and the negative effects it has on girls' education. For instance, they found that girls with low levels of schooling are more likely to be married early and that child marriage nearly always ends a girl's education. The report established that "schooling is protective against child marriage" (Malhotra et al., 2011, p. 14) with research showing that

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girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry compared to girls with little or no education (UNICEF, 2007). Additionally, a child bride's lack of education and access to peer networks limits her support systems, skills, mobility, and connections necessary to escape the cycle of poverty at the individual and household level (Malhotra et al., 2011).

The ICRW study discussed the adolescent girl club approach as the first of five main strategies used by NGOs to delay marriage and/or to prevent child marriage. These strategies include: 1) empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks; 2) educating and mobilizing parents and community members; 3) enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls; 4) offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families; and 5) fostering an enabling legal and policy framework. The report found that the first strategy, the girls' empowerment strategy, was implemented in the greatest number of programs with 18 of the 23 reviewed programs using this strategy. These programs typically incorporated aspects of life skills training, vocational skills training, advocacy campaigns, mentoring and peer group training, and 'safe spaces' or clubs where girls can meet and socialize outside of the home.

The focus of this approach was on girls themselves and building their skills through training, sharing information and developing support networks (Malhotra et al., 2011). The evaluation results from the report found that "the strongest results were documented by programs that worked directly with girls to empower them with information, skills and resources" (Malhotra et al., p. 23). Therefore, the researchers found a strong link between the girls' empowerment strategy and girls' abilities to refuse child marriage. The main rationale was that if girls are equipped to know themselves, their world, and their options better they will be able to act and advocate for themselves.

In addition, the international development actor, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) conducted a study into the adolescent girls' club model in relation to girls' education and leadership development. In its report "The Power to Lead: A Leadership Model for Adolescent Girls" (Baric et al., 2009), the authors conducted a literature review together with expert informant interviews to understand girls' leadership models conducted in formal and non-formal school settings. The report found that most of the literature on girls' leadership programs involves investigating safe spaces outside of the formal school setting. The idea of creating a 'safe space' or 'safe environment' is crucial; "a safe environment is integral to fostering young leaders, as are proper role models and mentors" (Baric et al., 2009,

p. 14). Role models and mentors play an essential role in girls' leadership programs. They must ensure that they model the leadership characteristics that they hope to foster in the girls they work with while assuming a facilitator role. Baric et al. (2009) explain that:

> Safe spaces allow girls to have an outlet to freely express themselves and in so doing not only recognize their individuality, but also find their voice. With the help of thoughtful mentors, girls are more likely to speak out and try their leadership skills (p. 15).

This study also explores how notions of leadership overlap with notions of empowerment. The authors explain that "it is not that one develops before the other, but rather that they develop in parallel, where girls who show leadership are more empowered, and greater empowerment enables girls to express their leadership" (Baric et al., 2009, p. 17). To understand the relationship between leadership and empowerment, CARE's gender empowerment framework is used, which addresses three inter-connecting aspects of social change: agency, structures, and human relationships. Thus, if leadership development work is to be accomplished, program activities cannot stop at the individual level of change, instead, concerted efforts must seek to change structures and promote supportive relationships and environments for girls.

In conclusion, these reports and research studies illustrate the various program approaches to girls' empowerment through non-formal education, particularly through the adolescent girls' club model. Despite striving to meet different outcomes (preventing GBV, ending child marriage, etc.) most of the studies exhibit similar elements within the girls' club model (safe spaces, role models and mentoring, and life skills training). This is a promising finding in that it showcases the impact of this program approach to meet various outcomes. Especially in the context of Uganda, where school-based clubs are the norm, there is huge potential for using schools as a site for non-formal education programs for adolescent girls.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Conceptualizing Empowerment

In this study, I employ a feminist analytical framework based on the concept of 'empowerment' to understand the ways in which education can be empowering and in parallel, how empowerment programs can improve educational outcomes for adolescent girls. This framework was chosen to reflect and explore the language that has become widely used in development rhetoric when discussing girls' education. It will include an exploration of the different forms of power and its link to issues of girls' education. In recognition of the multiple and cross-cutting ways the concept has been understood and employed by various actors, I must clarify that for this study I will explore the term 'empowerment' in relation to scholars within the field of gender and women's studies.

Stromquist (1993) suggests that the 'empowerment' concept was first coined during the United States civil rights movement in the 1950s to 1960s and then the concept was employed by the feminist movement in the mid-1970s (Brock-Utne, 2000). In the 1990s, empowerment began to enter the lexicon of mainstream gender and development discourse and documents of international institutions and donors (Brock-Utne, 2000; Parpart et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1995). Brock-Utne (2000) argues that given this shift, there is a need to reclaim the concept of 'empowerment' from institutions, such as the World Bank, that have co-opted the term. Rather than using the term to further people power, self-reliance, and self-determination, the term has been used to further the World Bank's aim of bringing more people into the free market economy. Turok (1992) critiques the co-optation of the concept by the World Bank when he writes "people's empowerment is here not directed at greater self-reliance and sustainable development, but at further entry to world markets" (p. 51).

Thus, one can start to see how 'empowerment', specifically women's empowerment, has become one of the most widely used terms in international development work. Simultaneous, it is one of the most under-theorized concepts (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003; Monkman, 2011) and one of the least understood in terms of how it is to be measured and observed (Medel-Anonuevo & Bochynek, 1995). Some even claim that the concept has become a 'buzzword' used by governments and NGOs to secure financial funding (Cornwall & Brock, 2005). As Monkman (2011) points out, "these superficial uses of the term undermine its ability to expose

social processes that relate to gender equity and the processes of becoming empowered" (p. 5). Given the different areas of use of the concept, and different contextual frameworks, "one specific definition of empowerment has yet to be set" (Holmarsdottir et al., 2011, p. 16). Nevertheless, "the concept of 'empowerment', if it is used precisely and deliberately, can help to focus thought, planning, and action in development" (Rowlands, 1995, p. 106). Therefore, there is a growing recognition of the importance of feminist researchers to clearly define and operationalize the empowerment theory in academic spaces.

Given the diverse notions on empowerment, I draw on Stromquist's (2015b) four dimension model together with Rowland's (1995, 1997) three levels model and four forms of power. I chose to employ these models for this study because of these scholars' deep engagement with questions around the concept of 'empowerment' in relation to gender and women's education. The models are also flexible, which is crucial for this study since Stromquist and Rowlands conceptualized 'women's empowerment' and for this study, I will conceptualize 'girls' empowerment'. First, I will discuss Stromquist's (2015b) four dimensions of empowerment and then move on to Rowland's models. I will also engage with the work of Kabeer (1999) who stresses that "empowerment entails a process of change" (p. 437) and that women's empowerment is both dependent on collective solidarity in the public arena and individual assertiveness in the private sphere (Kabeer, 1999; Monkman, 2011).

I begin the investigation of the term 'empowerment' with the work of Nelly Stromquist who for the last two decades has been a key theorist exploring questions of gender, empowerment, and education. In 1993, Stromquist defined 'empowerment' in the context of women's rights as "a process to change the distribution of power, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society" (p. 13). This definition suggests that empowerment involves more than an individual process; it must also seek ways of translating into collective action (Stromquist, 2015b). Stromquist (2015b) expanded her definition in 2015, when she defines empowerment as "a set of knowledge, skills, and conditions that women must possess in order to understand their world and to act upon it" (p. 308). With this definition as a guide, Stromquist divides the concept of empowerment into four interlocking dimensions with a recognition of the ways in which the micro- and macro-levels intersect and interact:

- *Economic*- financial autonomy
- *Political*- ability to be represented or represent oneself at various venues of decision-making

- *Knowledge-* awareness of one's reality, including possibilities and challenges to women's equality
- *Psychological-* the sense that one's self has value and deserves a good and fair existence (Stromquist, 2015b, p. 308).

The economic dimension is related to women's access to material goods and financial resources at the micro- and macro-levels. It is not only about one's ability to earn money, but also the ability to control how it is distributed, invested, or spent (Monkman, 2011). For instance, reducing poverty helps women since they are the most vulnerable within poor households and are generally the managers of the poorest households (Stromquist, 2015b). Political empowerment points to the processes around decision-making in collective and group processes, which includes making household decisions and the gendered division of labor as well as actively participating in community and national governance processes. The third dimension, knowledge empowerment "widens people's mental horizons, enabling them to see both larger pictures and more detailed accounts of social phenomenon" (Stromquist, 2015b, p. 313). It must be emancipatory knowledge that develops a critical understanding of the subordination that women experience. Psychological empowerment conveys women's need to feel self-confident, have strong self-esteem, and develop self-assertiveness to press for societal change and feel able to enter public spaces.

I suggest that 'physical empowerment' be added to the four dimensions as outlined by Stromquist (2015b), particularly when we are discussing girls' empowerment. Women and girls around the world are surrounded by media and advertising images that represent historical narratives that imagine and present the female body as inevitably weak, vulnerable, and inferior to the male body (Hargreaves, 1994). The period of adolescence is a particularly transformational time for girls and their relationships to their bodies as they move through the stages of puberty. Adolescence is the beginning of major bodily changes, including the beginning of menstruation, which presents a myriad of challenges for girls growing up in poverty who do not have access to proper menstrual hygiene resources. It is a period marked by rapid physical and emotional changes that requires accurate knowledge and information. At this turning point in a girl's life, the development of a positive relationship with one's body and emotions is integral for her to make informed decisions and choices.

A girl's relationship with her body also shows up in her relationship to her sexuality – how she experiences and expresses herself sexually. Interest in sexual activity typically increases at the time that a girl reaches puberty (Carlson & Heth, 2007). Adolescents begin to connect to newly

realized erotic sexual feelings and behaviors. They are also more influenced by a need for acceptance from peers as they begin to struggle for independence and control from their parents. In the process, they are likely to enter romantic and sexual relationships for their first time while also beginning to feel conflicted due to religious pressure, particularly in countries such as Uganda that are predominately Christian (84% of the population) (UBOS, 2016).

Girls' understanding and relationship with their bodies during adolescence and the beginning of sexual relationships also becomes part and parcel of their roles as empowered leaders (Wolf & Africa, 2017) and must be accounted for in these dimensions of empowerment. The main pressures facing girls at this period do not promote a healthy relationship with their bodies as agents and as instruments of action (Young, 1990). Thus, a theory of empowerment must be grounded within the historical precedent that women lack power in relation to their bodies and within their bodies—a phenomenon manifested in experiences of bodily alienation and insecurity (Brace-Govan, 2002; Liimakka, 2011).

Jo Rowlands (1995) is another important scholar on the notion of empowerment in the context of its root-concept, power. She defines empowerment as it is related to inclusion in decision-making process; it involves both bringing people who are outside decision-making processes into it and the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space. Rowlands (1995) emphasizes the importance of conceptualizing 'empowerment' as a process that involves "moving from insight to action" (p. 103). Empowerment, then, is not simply about building self-esteem or other individual characteristics, it is about developing the capabilities to engage in social change processes (Monkman, 2011). In other words, "empowerment entails a process of change" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). In recognition of this notion of empowerment as a social process, Rowlands (1995) conceptualizes three levels of empowerment:

- *Personal-* where empowerment is about developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalised oppression.
- *Close relationships-* where empowerment is about developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within it.
- *Collective-* where individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have done alone. This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on cooperation rather than competition. Collective action may be locally

focused – for example, at village or neighbourhood level, or institutional, such as national networks or the United Nations. (p. 103)

The individual, relational, and collective dimensions focus our attention on the varying kinds of spaces and actions that contribute to empowerment (Monkman, 2011).

These three levels of empowerment complement the five dimensions of empowerment by illustrating how empowerment is experienced by individuals within each level. While Stromquist (2015b) limits the levels to the micro- and macro-levels (private and public spheres), Rowlands (1995) includes a middle level – the meso level – so that the space of relationships and the dynamics within are explored in more depth. This is a crucial level to include when discussing 'girls' empowerment' as the lives and well-beings of adolescent girls is deeply influenced and impacted by their close relationships with their families, peers, and other community members. In Figure 3.1, I have combined these two models to illustrate the relationship and interaction between the five dimensions of empowerment and the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of empowerment.

Figure 3.1: Levels and dimensions of girls' empowerment
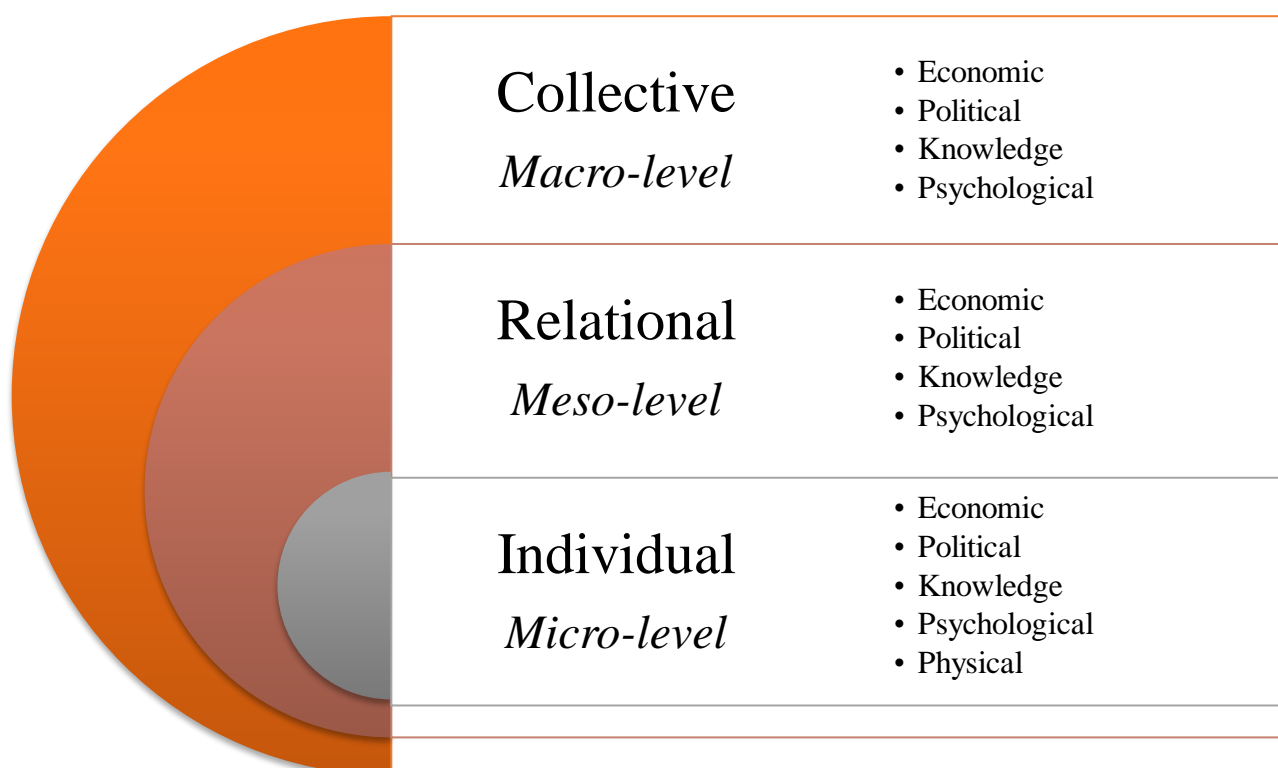
Another key theorist on women's empowerment is Naila Kabeer. She also emphasizes the processual nature of empowerment and of the significance of viewing empowerment from

multiple contextual levels. She defines empowerment as: "the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 435). It presupposes that one must first be disempowered before one can become empowered. "In other words, empowerment entails a process of change" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). Kabeer adds the element of choice when she speaks of 'strategic life choices'. She differentiates between first- and second-order choices. The former are strategic life choices that are critical for people to live the lives they want (including choices around marriage, children, etc.) while the latter are less significant choices that may be important for the quality of one's life, but do not constitute its defining parameters.

Furthermore, Kabeer (1999) emphasizes what she calls 'strategies of empowerment'. This is related to the notion that there is a role for individual agency in challenging gender inequality, but that collective solidarity is necessary to create larger structural and societal change. She argues that "in a context where cultural values constrain women's ability to make strategic life choices, structural inequalities cannot be addressed by individuals alone" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 457). Therefore, women's empowerment is dependent on collective solidarity in the public arena often led and organized by women's organizations and social movements with the aim to create the conditions for change and reduce the costs for the individual.

3.1.1 Structure of Power

Some of the confusion surrounding the concept of 'empowerment' is rooted in the disputed notion of 'power' and how it is understood and experienced in differing ways by different people (Rowlands, 1995). Power has been the subject of discussion for centuries within different academic fields with scholars as varied as Hobbes, Machiavelli and Foucault grappling with this term (Holmarsdottir et al., 2011). The common conception of power is limited to the dominant masculine experience of 'power over' that is intentionally exclusive of other forms of power (Donahoe, 2017). More recently, power scholars and social justice advocates have begun to analyze existing configurations and definitions of power in order to neutralize, counteract, or transform them (McGee, 2016). These alternative ways to explore how power operates and is expressed, is useful to a comprehensive understanding of the empowerment process. Rowlands (1997) offers a useful differentiation of power through the description of the following four forms of power:

- *Power over-* coercive and controlling power, may be responded to with compliance, resistance, force, or manipulation
- *Power to-* personal agency, generative or productive power that creates possibilities and actions without direct domination
- *Power with-* groups tackling problems together and building collective strength, the sense that the whole is greater than the sum of the individuals
- *Power from within-* a person's sense of self-acceptance, self-worth, and self-respect, which extends to respect for and acceptance of others as equals (p. 13)

Rowlands offers these four terms of expressions of power (over, to, with, within) that interact with the various levels (individual, relational, collective) and dimensions of empowerment (knowledge, physical, political, economic, and psychological). Through looking at the aspects of 'power to', 'power with', and 'power from within', power is again expressed more as a process and as related to the concept of agency (Holmarsdottir et al., 2011). In this study, I explore adolescent girls' experiences of all four forms of power and how this relates to girls' understandings and experiences of empowerment.

3.2 Empowerment in Education

Critical to this study is the notion of how education can contribute to the process of becoming empowered at the individual, relational, and collective level. Within Stromquist's empowerment theory, knowledge continues to be considered a major force of empowerment, not just as general knowledge but "knowledge that is pertinent to identifying the conditions of subordination that women experience and exploring how such conditions can be contested" (Stromquist, 2015b, p. 313). Therefore, it is problematic to assume that participation in formal schooling will automatically lead to empowerment. It is important to not only consider the number of years of schooling, but also to assess the quality of that education (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003) in relation to how girls are prepared with the knowledge and skills to respond to the patriarchal social order in which they live.

Stromquist (2013) makes a useful distinction between education and schooling, wherein education refers to the transmission of broad and specific knowledge that can transcend national school systems, and schooling relates to the institutionalized type of knowledge transmitted through formal education institutions. By means of this definition, she finds that "although schooling is important for economic and social advancement, it is not sufficient to alter women's subordinate positions" (Stromquist, 2013, p. 176). Schooling alone does not

create social change, especially to transform deeply engrained gendered norms and stereotypes. Therefore, Stromquist is an advocate for non-formal educational spaces that have the potential to provide what she calls an 'empowering education' – an education that empowers girls to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to counter gendered stereotypes. However, Stromquist (2015b), cautions that not all non-formal education programs lead to the development of gender consciousness. Non-formal education spaces must include gender-sensitive curriculum for all students that addresses sex education, sexuality, the formation of masculinity and femininity, gender-based violence, women's rights, and an overall understanding of how gender ideologies shape one's everyday life.

Furthermore, Stromquist (2015b) argues that empowerment must be considered as a theory of social change that does not end at the empowerment of an individual woman, but also one that translates into collective action against the status-quo. She writes that "knowledge is valuable insofar as it leads to action" (Stromquist, 2015b, p. 320). This is where, similar to Kabeer's (1999) thinking, there needs to be a greater recognition that organizations working on gender issues at the local and national levels must play an active role in women's empowerment work. Stromquist finds that transformative non-formal education programs are usually run by NGOs, and primarily by women-led NGOs.

3.3 Measuring Empowerment?

Development practitioners have attempted to quantify empowerment to make the concept more solid and amenable to cost/benefit equations for policy considerations (Kabeer, 1999). The major instrument constructed to monitor progress towards women's empowerment is the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the mid-1990s. The GEM is built on three indicators: two indicators measure the female share in political power (seats in Parliament) and managerial positions in professional sectors, and the third indicator looks at income from formal sector employment (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003). The crucial issue with the GEM is that its conception of empowerment is limited to political and economic empowerment, and therefore does not explain the various dimensions and levels of empowerment that allows for a more holistic view of women's empowerment.

Many scholars agree that there are critical issues related to women's empowerment that cannot be quantified in a conventional sense (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003; Kabeer, 1999; Monkman, 2011; Rowlands, 1995; Stromquist, 2015b). For instance, Kabeer (1999) calls it "a form of social change that tends to be the least amenable to measurement" (p. 442) while Stromquist (2015b) points out "given its complex and interactive nature, empowerment cannot be reduced to quantitative indicators, but requires a descriptive account of how various dimensions' support each other" (p. 309). One of the major critiques of the project of measuring empowerment is related to the processual understanding of empowerment, meaning that individual and social change takes time. At the same time, Charmes and Wieringa (2003) point out that there is no single linear model of a woman's empowerment process. Instead, the path towards empowerment is experienced differently by each woman. This conception of the unordered processual nature of empowerment presents challenges to the ongoing preoccupation for the measurement and quantification of empowerment within the policy domain.

Another critique comes from gender scholars who challenge the idea of quantifying empowerment as a reflection of the dominant Eurocentric paradigm of empowerment. In his paper, Syed (2010) argues that:

> the GEM is limited in content, i.e., scope and value, because of its inherent capitalist and secular bias, and also in context because it is based on a notion of equal opportunity that does not adequately take into account gender diversity and its implications on gender empowerment in various socio-political contexts (p.283-4).

This dominant notion is based on the conception that all women are part of a homogenous group and in effect reduces non-Western women's individual and collective stories (Mohanty, 1991). In response to the limitations of the GEM, Syed (2010) offers a context-specific, relational, and multilevel framework that aims to analyze the institutional and structural dimensions of power at multiple levels. Thus, to get at these more complex (less quantitatively measurable) social processes, qualitative research that is contexualized, nuanced and locally grounded is important (Monkman, 2011; Rowlands, 1995). If not, any attempts to measure or implement empowerment programs run into the danger of prescribing a particular process of empowerment and thereby, violating its essence, which is to enhance women's self-determination (Kabeer, 1999).

Together, these scholars present valuable vantage points and concrete models to begin to make sense of the concept of 'empowerment' for this study while also understanding the critical need to treat empowerment in a relational, holistic and processual manner. This study is also aware that these theorists are bound to questions surrounding the concept of 'women's empowerment' rather than 'girls' empowerment', which means that the models and definitions of empowerment must be reassessed for their applicability to the experiences of choice and power among adolescent girls living in Kampala, Uganda. At this time, despite the wide-use of the term 'girls' empowerment' within the development world, there is scant academic work on this concept. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to this theoretical knowledge gap by critically engaging with the concept of 'girls' empowerment' through combining the conceptual definitions and models offered by these scholars and the understandings and realities of empowerment as expressed by the participants in this study.

4 Research Design and Methods

4.1 Research Strategy

For this study, I used a qualitative research approach grounded in a feminist and Afrocentric paradigm (Mkabela, 2005). It is based on a qualitative methodology to draw out the meanings, perceptions and understandings that individuals attach to behaviors, experiences, and social phenomena (Walter, 2010). As Brock-Utne (1996) eloquently explains "qualitative research is holistic, in the sense that it attempts to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences that affect human behavior" (p. 609).

Within a feminist research approach, I aimed to tackle issues from the perspective that gender and patriarchy are political forces that are central to the way that societies organize themselves and to the way that individuals understand their choices and behavior. A feminist framework explores how gender differences and inequalities are constructed and perpetrated through institutions, attitudes, and opportunities. It also takes adolescent girls; location and standpoint in the world as the basis for research. It seeks to ground the study in the female student's situated experiences, hearing their personal accounts, and privileging their subjective viewpoints. Girl's lives, experiences, ideas, and needs have been absent from social science research because we live in a world which values male knowledge and perspective (Brayton, 1997).

Feminist research also "must not be abstract and removed from the subject of investigation but instead must have a commitment to working towards societal change" (Brayton, 1997, p. 6). It is for this reason that I decided to work closely with Girl Up Initiative Uganda (GUIU), a local women-led NGO that identified the research question as one that will enable the organization to improve its programing and organizational sustainability. The research aimed to produce findings on the efficacy and impact of the adolescent girls' club model that can be used to further the organizational mission as well as provide insight for other organizations working to empower and improve the well-being of adolescent girls.

The research strategy is also based on Mkabela's (2005) Afrocentric method, which suggests "cultural and social immersion as opposed to scientific distance as the best approach to understand African phenomena" (p. 180). The Afrocentric approach is based on Asante's

(1987) Afrocentric paradigm, which looks at the question of African identity from the perspective of African people as located, oriented and culturally grounded. From a research point of view, it becomes necessary to "examine all data from the standpoint of Africans as subjects and human agents rather than as objects in a European frame of reference" (Mkabela, 2005, p. 179). This implies that the researcher recognizes the African voice and puts the subject's point-of-view at the center of the research project.

Mkabela (2005) maintains that African-centered research also strives to place the ideals of 'ubuntu'- the collective sense of responsibility and consciousness that moves beyond the self- throughout the research process. Such research is collaborative and cooperative as it is conducted on behalf of the community and individuals within the community. It strives to balance the power relationships inherent in research projects by involving participants at all levels of the research process. This participatory and collective approach ensures that the research is a negotiated partnership, wherein the community is "part of the research every step of the way and collectively validating the research helps guide the research toward enhancing community and cultural activity" (Mkabela, 2005, p. 185). In sum, an Afrocentric method requires the redefinition and reworking of the relationship between the traditional researcher and the researched within a paradigm that recognizes and appreciates the African indigenous collective ethos.

For this research to adhere within an Afrocentric research approach, I worked collaboratively with GUIU staff throughout the research stages. As I formulated the research study and specific research questions, I consulted with the Executive Director, Monica Nyiraguhabwa, who is a close colleague and friend, as co-founders of the organization.[5] In a similar fashion, throughout the research process I worked collaboratively with the program team that handles the Girl Up Club. Given their daily interactions with the participants in the club, their input and advice was invaluable. They provided feedback on the interview guide as well as the best method for interviewing participants. After the data analysis, I shared the data, analysis, findings and conclusions with the study participants and GUIU staff for verification, since they are the experts and owners of their own personal experiences (Brayton, 1997).

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[5] Monica was also the first person to bring to my attention the misuse and misunderstanding of the term 'empowerment'. For this conversation and others revolving around Western terms and assumptions that are not translated for the African context, I am indebted.

I chose to employ a feminist and Afrocentric qualitative research approach for this study to create the space for the experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of adolescent schoolgirls to be listened to and taken seriously. It is a holistic approach in that it is participatory and collective so that the research motivates and acknowledges the support of all individuals who have invested time and energy into the research process (Mkabela, 2005). As feminist research, I ensured that it was an applied study, so that the findings can contribute to feminist work to create societal change. Throughout the process, I used participant's language and narratives to construct knowledge on education and empowerment from their perspectives. The aim of this action research is not only to provide useful insights for program design for organizations such as Girl Up Initiative Uganda, but also to contribute to academic and international development discussions around what it means to educate and empower adolescent girls.

4.2 Research Design

Given that participant's perceptions, personal experiences, and meaning-making are at the core of the research design, the choice of a qualitative approach was most appropriate. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the individual experiences of education and empowerment, I conducted data collection through multiple avenues: semi-structured interviews, unstructured observations, and review of supplementary documents. The interviews with the girls, which formed the center of the data collection, were supported by observations of the Girl Up Club, non-formal conversations with teachers and Girl Up Initiative Uganda staff members, a review of the Girl Up Club curriculum, and life stories for three of the girls in the intervention group.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I employed ten semi-structured, in-depth, and open-ended interviews with adolescent girls living in the Kampala District, Uganda from January to March 2018. Five participants were from the intervention group, those that graduated from the 10-month long Girl Up Club in their primary school, and five participants were from the control group, those that had not benefited from any girls' empowerment intervention or participated in any adolescent girls' club in their school. The research design intended to capture the impact of the program by singling out the Girl Up Club as the variable in the girls' experiences of education and empowerment.

The interview process was led by an interview guide that I produced with questions grouped by topic: being an adolescent girl in school, empowerment, and role models/futures. For the

intervention group, I added questions around their participation in the Girl Up Clubs, which invariably lent itself to longer and more in-depth conversations. Under each topic, I created a list of questions that served more as a guide than a required list. It included questions related to how participants felt when wearing different clothing: the school uniform and/or the Girl Up T-shirt. This question was intentional given the significance of clothing in the context of Kampala, especially for school children who must wear school uniforms. Similarly, the Girl Up T-shirt is a marker of the girls' participation in the club and was chosen as a question to understand how girls feel when they wear this piece of clothing in public and how it influences how they are treated by others.

The semi-structured interview design was chosen to keep the structure of the interviews to a minimum to enhance the opportunity of genuinely revealing the perspectives of the research participants (Bryman, 2012). This allowed for more flexibility and for the conversations to flow as naturally as possible so that the experiences of each individual girl could be explored in more depth. By making the interview process as flexible as possible, I could maintain an emphasis on how the participant frames and makes meaning of their social world rather than coming to the research with presupposed assumptions (Bryman, 2012). Throughout the interview, I also observed participant's non-verbal communication cues as illustrated in her body language, such as eye contact, fidgeting in the chair, etc. to assess their levels of confidence and self-esteem. After each interview, I wrote down notes on the girls' body language as additional data.

Field Notes

In addition to the key interviews, data was collected through field notes that were taken throughout the data collection periods, 6 weeks between June and July 2017 and 16 weeks between January and May 2018. I attended various activities conducted by GUIU, including Girl Up Club training sessions which were most relevant for the study. I kept a notebook where I recorded my daily observations and informal conversations with girls, teachers, and GUIU staff members throughout the data collection period. Conversations with and observations of two GUIU staff were especially critical: Monica, the Executive Director, and Gloria, a Program Officer for the Girl Up Club. I typed these notes in a file on my personal laptop where I separated my observations into two columns: neutral observations and my interpretations.

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During the 4.5 months I was in Kampala, I intentionally lived in the urban slum community in Nakawa Division where the research was conducted. This allowed me to gain a deeper contextual understanding of the daily lives, challenges, and possibilities faced by the research participants while broadening my perspectives of the research. My daily interactions with locals also informed the language that I used in the interviews, given that there is a specific use of the English language that differs from my own (for example, "marks" for "grades", "washing utensils" for "washing dishes", "revise books" for "studying" etc.) Given my location, I also came into more regular contact with the participants in the study, whereby I could see their lives outside of the formal interview confines. For instance, I ran into Margret and her friends often as we were both on the way to the marketplace to buy food. This gave me the opportunity to observe her life and interactions in the community outside of primary school and GUIU's office space.

Review of Supplementary Documents

Given my insider location within the organization as a co-founder, I had access to an abundance of additional documents to supplement the research, including training activity reports, grant applications, donor reports, budgets, pre- and post-training evaluations, and more. For this study, however, the most relevant document was the Girl Up Club Curriculum (GUIU, 2018) that was initially developed by the GUIU team, namely Monica and Gloria in December 2015. It is a working document and is constantly being updated and refined based on the needs of the girls. It includes the ten topics and lessons that are taught to all girls in the Girl Up Club. The curriculum was analyzed to inform the purpose of the study as well as the structure of the interview guide for the intervention group prior to leaving for fieldwork.

Additionally, for this study, I reviewed and included sections of the in-depth life stories of three adolescent girls who participated in the Girl Up Clubs. From August 2017 to February 2018, a GUIU volunteer collected the stories of 20 girls who had graduated from the Girl Up Club. Three of these girls were also chosen to participate in this study, and therefore, their stories provided additional information. I received consent from the volunteer to include parts of their stories in this study to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and contexts in which the girls live.

4.3 Research Site

The sampling of the schools was purposive, since it was central to the comparative element of this study that the Girl Up Club intervention was active in one of the schools and not in the other. At the same time, it was necessary to ensure that the schools were as similar as possible in all other ways - student demographics, location, funding, etc. Therefore, I conducted the research among two public, government-aided Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools in peri-urban areas of Nakawa District in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. The Intervention School was chosen because it was the first school where GUIU rolled out its Girl Up Club and it continues to be a strong partner for the organization. The Control School was chosen since it had no girls' empowerment interventions at the school to date, and there was low awareness among teachers and school administrators about the work of GUIU.

The schools were selected based on their relative geography within Kampala. They are both based in an urban low-income area of Kampala, with many parents struggling to pay school fees for their children and wherein adolescent girls face a myriad of challenges due to poverty and gender inequalities. Both schools have approximately 2,000 pupils, which has resulted in a high teacher to student ratio, approximately 1 to 100 pupils. Despite being a UPE school, children must still pay school fees, which are around $60 USD per year or 210,000 UGX. In Uganda, persons in paid employment earn a monthly income of approximately $31 USD a month or 110,000 UGX (UBOS, 2014), which means that for each child attending primary school, a parent must spend 16 percent of their yearly income on school fees.

In addition, field notes and other supplementary documents were collected through engagement with GUIU and its staff at its headquarter office in Kirombe B Zone, Butabika Parish in Nakawa Division, Kampala District. The area lies in the southeastern part of Kampala and is adjacent to the northern shores of Lake Victoria, Africa's largest freshwater lake. It is also home to Butabika Mental Hospital, the only referral public mental hospital in Uganda, and Luzira Maximum Security Prison, the only maximum security prison in the country. The office is situated within the community whereby you must walk through houses and small shops to arrive there. This was intentional so that the community members could freely come to the office whenever needed rather than placing the office in a less accessible location in the city center. The office site is also located nearby to the Intervention School and other schools so that girls can easily pass by on their way home from school. Participants from the intervention group were interviewed at the GUIU office since primary school was closed for holidays in

January when I began the interview process. For the girls in the control group, interviews were held at the school in the teachers' room for privacy and quiet.

4.4 Participants and Selection Method

Participants for this study included ten adolescent girls who were in grades Primary 5 to Primary 7 (final year of primary school) or had completed primary school, and who lived in peri-urban slum areas of Kampala, Uganda (see Table 4.1). The age range was between 9 and 16 years. This age group was targeted given that this is the age range for participants in the intervention program. It is also a critical age of adolescence and development for girls as they experience puberty and transition from girlhood to womanhood. Five girls were selected from each school out of a pool of eligible participants. I chose to conduct in-depth interviews with ten participants so as not to overwhelm the research process and to provide the space and time to obtain thick descriptions and stories from the participants.

Table 4.1: Details of interview participants, divided by school, age, and grade level

Name	School	Age	Grade
Grace	Intervention School	16 years	Completed Primary, out-of-school
Margret	Intervention School	16 years	Primary 7
Vivian	Intervention School	12 years	Primary 7
Priscilla	Intervention School	12 years	Primary 6
Brenda	Intervention School	12 years	Primary 7
Sheila	Control School	9 years	Primary 5
Rebecca	Control School	12 years	Primary 6
Winnie	Control School	14 years	Primary 6
Farid	Control School	13 years	Primary 6
Agnes	Control School	16 years	Primary 6

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants.

The sampling in this study entailed generic purposive sampling to sample participants in a strategic way so that those who were sampled were relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012). For those in the intervention group, the criteria that I used included: being a graduate of the Girl Up Club within the last one to two years and identifying as a female. For those in the control group, the criteria included: never having joined any form of school-based adolescent girls' club and identifying as a female. I worked closely with GUIU staff and female teachers at each school to identify eligible participants. We sought to create diversity in terms of family economic situation, parent's level of education, home language, life background, age, religion, ethnic group, etc.

4.5 Levels and Units of Comparison

I used a comparative design to explore the impact of the adolescent girls' club model. I compared adolescent girls' experiences and meaning-making of formal and non-formal educational spaces by including both an intervention and control group. Using the Bray and Thomas (1995) cube, the comparison occurred on the spatial/geographic level to compare how girls' experiences in primary school operate at the individual level. The research focused on the individual level to understand the lived experiences and realities of the research participants at the two different schools. By looking at two different schools, I also explored the differences in nonlocational demographic groups. Through this research, I investigated how a girl's socio-economic, religious, and family background impacts her identity-formation and experience of being a girl in primary school.

In terms of aspects of education and of society, I explored the specific programmatic aspects of the Girl Up Club available for adolescent girls and how these structures influenced their experiences. The unit of analysis was the Girl Up Club. The Girl Up Club was established by GUIU in 2013. It is active in UPE schools with the aim to support girls to achieve their full academic potential; become leaders in their schools, homes, and communities; and make healthy, informed decisions about their bodies and futures (GUIU, 2017). The program includes a year-long training program that is based on a curriculum that covers topics such as life skills, communication, peer pressure, gender-based violence, puberty and menstruation, and entrepreneurship. As a member of the Girl Up Club, girls also learn hands on skills in making reusable sanitary pads and handicrafts as well as have access to the GUIU School Scholarship Fund. Once they graduate from the training program, girls are welcome to join the

Big Sisters Network wherein they organize advocacy campaigns in their schools and communities to share their newly acquired knowledge with others.

By looking at the experiences of adolescent girls' in both the intervention and control groups, the aim of this comparative study is to understand to what extent group participation affects gendered identify formation, individual, relational, and collective empowerment, and perceptions of being a schoolgirl.

4.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis took an inductive approach, wherein the themes identified were strongly driven by the data. Thematic analysis was chosen as the most appropriate method to maintain a feminist and Afrocentric research design that places the unique perceptions, experiences, and knowledge of participants at the center of the research project. With the use of a data-driven thematic approach, I intended for the process to be led by the participants rather than by my analytic preconceptions. The main aim of the research was to give voice to the participants of their own experiences rather than to make the data fit into previously held assumptions.

The process of data analysis began during and after transcribing all the interviews from audio recordings. As I transcribed the interviews, I began to highlight the main themes that were emerging out of the data. Through several re-reads of the transcribed data, field notes and supplementary documents, I then organized the data into larger themes and then into sub-themes and minor themes (see Table 4.2 and Table 4.3). I also created a separate coding document for the two groups (intervention and control) wherein I categorized the data under each interview question and within each question, into themes and sub-themes. From these two documents, I began comparing the data results from the two groups.

Table 4.2: Thematic Data Coding for the Control Group

Themes	Sub-Themes	Minor Themes
Gender Inequality	Environments	- Gender experiences at home vs. school environments - Issues with parents/guardians - Unequal time sharing of domestic chores between boys and girls

Poverty	School Fees	- Being chased out of school
		- Need for scholarships
Empowerment	Identity as a Girl	- Pride and confidence in being a girl
	Role Models/ Influencers	- Family members/ teachers
		- Changing friend groups

Table 4.3: Thematic Data Coding for the Intervention Group

Themes	Sub-Themes	Minor Themes
Gender Inequality	Environments	- Gender experiences at home vs. school environments
		- Issues with parents/guardians
		- Unequal time sharing of domestic chores between boys and girls
		- Importance of Girl Up office space and listening staff
	Cultural Perceptions	- Pressure for early marriage and pregnancy
		- Perceived financial return on sending boys to school rather than girls
	Safety	- Sexual abuse and harassment
Poverty	School Fees	- Being chased out of school
		- Need for scholarships
	Skills Development	- Importance of learning hands-on skills to make money and for menstrual management
Empowerment	Identity as a Girl	- Pride and confidence in being a girl
		- Refusing advances from boys/men
		- Reaching individual goals

	Girl Up Club	- Speaking for themselves, "power to talk" without fearing - Becoming assertive - Improved school performances
	Role Models/ Influencers	- Girl Up coaches - Family members - Changing friend groups - Becoming an influencer

4.7 Quality Measures

As Bryman (2012) explains "both reliability and measurement validity are essentially concerned with the adequacy of measures, which are most obviously a concern in quantitative research" (p. 48). Given that this study is qualitative and more concerned with stories than numbers, I chose to evaluate the validity and reliability based on the alternative criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994): trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is made up of the following four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To ensure credibility, I conducted the research according to the canons of good practice and submitted the research findings to the participants to confirm that it represented their understanding of their social world, otherwise known as 'respondent validation' (Bryman, 2012). I also used my existing relationship with staff at GUIU to confirm my analysis of the findings.

Transferability of findings in a qualitative study is a challenge given its focus on depth rather than breadth. As a result, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that researchers can instead provide thick descriptions, rich accounts of the details of the culture, so that others can make judgements about the possible transferability to other contexts. Therefore, I attempted to provide thick descriptions throughout the study to present the context for future researchers. Dependability relates to adopting an auditing approach wherein complete records are kept throughout all phases of the research process and which are audited by a peer (Bryman, 2012). This was ensured through working closely with my supervisor who reviewed the research documents. Confirmability requires that the researcher attempts as much as possible to not

allow her personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the research process. The audit process ensured that the study met the conditions for confirmability.

In addition, as a feminist Afrocentric action research project, authenticity was ensured so that the research should have a larger impact beyond the realms of academia. This study aims to provide GUIU as well as other NGOs working in the field of girls' education and empowerment with useful information on girls' lived experiences and understandings of 'empowerment' for informed program design and implementation.

4.8 Ethics

I recognize that the research had the potential of meeting ethical challenges, particularly as it relates to working with adolescent girls under the age of 18 years. Therefore, I worked to ensure that all ethical considerations were met before setting out on the research project. I took utmost care to maintain integrity throughout the research process following Diner and Crandall's (1978) four main areas of ethical principles. These ethical principles include: 1) whether there is harm to participants; 2) whether there is a lack of informed consent; 3) whether there is an invasion of privacy; and 4) whether deception is involved. First, I ensured that there was no harm done to participants through their inclusion in the research study. I strived to establish a comfortable setting for the interviews and set a time that worked best for the participants. Most importantly, because the questions had the potential to touch on delicate topics, I was prepared that distress could be caused by the telling and revealing of sensitive stories. In the cases where it was apparent that a participant required additional counselling or other mental health services, I informed staff of GUIU who took the case forward with their trained counselors.

Second, given that all participants were under the age of 18 years, the research required parental/guardian informed consent that stipulated the nature of the research and the rights of the participants to remain anonymous and to withdraw at any stage of the research process. I produced an information letter that included participants' rights, shared it with the girls, and received signed consent from the parents/guardians of each girl. Participants were also informed through oral communication of the purpose of the research and their rights throughout the process. Third, the right to privacy was respected as the participant could at any point of the interview refuse to answer a question if it became too sensitive. Confidentiality of participants was also respected through the use of pseudonyms. Finally, there were no issues

of deception since the research objectives were openly shared with both GUIU staff as well as with participants and their parents/guardians. At the conclusion of the study, all involved parties were provided with a summary of the research findings. In addition, before the data collection process, I received ethical clearance from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD).

4.9 Limitations

A major limitation of this study was language. While all the participants understood some level of English, it was clear with others that they did not understand some of my questions, possibly because of my American accent and the differences in word choice. Before each interview, I asked my the Girl Up Club Program Officer, Gloria, if the girl wanted her to act as a translator into Luganda, the main local language spoken in Kampala. In all cases the girl preferred to speak to me alone even though it seemed translation could have been useful for a few interviews. Nevertheless, during the interviews I endeavored to use the Ugandan English and Luganda that I knew from my six years of living and working in Uganda, which seemed to ease the situation in some cases.

Another key concern of the study was that any reported changes in the intervention groups are self-reported and so the participants may have been telling me what they thought I expected them to say (Bandiera et al., 2012). Particularly given my embeddedness within the organization, this 'positive bias' may have shaped the findings as participants in the intervention group were more inclined to discuss the positive aspects of the program. In response to this challenge, I endeavored to create a safe space for the interviews and constantly reminded participants that there was no right or wrong answer.

4.10 Positionality and Reflexivity

The feminist and Afrocentric approach both place emphasis on the role of the researcher throughout the research process. Feminist scholarship challenges the notion that there is "an independent reality to be known separate from the subjective knower" (Taylor, 1998, p. 368) given that every aspect of a researcher's position, social location and standpoint is incorporated into all aspects of the research endeavor. Researcher subjectivity is deeply implicated in the research process; at all times the researcher must be aware of her subjectivity (Brayton, 1997).

Similarly, the Afrocentric paradigm operates from "the notion that researchers come from different histories, have different experiences, linguistic practices, cultures, and talents" (Mkabela, 2005, p. 181). I recognize that I came to this research from a vastly different background and life experience than the research participants. I am also very aware of the power dynamics at play given my position as a white outsider from a Northern country. In the past, research has excluded the very communities in which the research is conducted and as a result "research is often viewed as a 'colonial intrusion', a use of power by the powerful" (Mkabela, 2005, p. 182). By employing an Afrocentric and feminist approach throughout the research process, I aimed to break down these boundaries by creating room for the voices of the participants to lead the research and break down my own assumptions. Within this approach, it was also crucial that I brought awareness to my own positioning in the research process and how every observation, interpretation, and outcome was colored by my positionality.

My positionality as co-founder of the organization that forms the basis of this study, Girl Up Initiative Uganda, situated me in a particular space. While it provided me with insider access to the inner workings of GUIU and easy access to interview participants, it also meant that participants could have been telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, particularly regarding their experiences in the Girl Up Club. Given this, I attempted to choose participants for the study who did not know about my role with GUIU, and instead viewed me as a researcher. On the other hand, in some cases it was beneficial to have existing relationships with the girls as they felt more comfortable to discuss sensitive issues with me.

My position within GUIU also embeds me in a world of 'doing good' that some feminist academics (Sensoy & Marshall, 2010) have coined 'missionary girl power' or the 'girl powering of humanitarianism' (Koffman & Gill, 2013; Koffman, Orgard, & Gill, 2015). Sensoy and Marshall (2010) define 'missionary girl power' as "the newly emergent discursive strategies that construct first world girls as the saviours of their 'Third World' sisters" (p. 296). It is a product of the girl power discourse that emerged in North America and the UK in the late 1980s and 1990s that presents girls as powerful social actors who can do anything that boys do (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005). During the same period, the narrative within NGO communication was shifting from telling the story of passive victims to more 'positive images' that depict poor women as dignified, empowered, and active agents (Wilson, 2011). It is in this

context that "the empowered girl has emerged as a celebrated figure" (Koffmann et al., 2015, p. 158).

Throughout the research process, I have come to understand the role of the 'girl power' activism within my own personal life and how growing up in the neoliberal context of the United States may have had an unconscious effect on my work and the topic for this study. However, throughout the last six years of my work with Ugandan adolescent girls, I have been careful to never say that I am 'saving Ugandan girls' or depict them as poor and unable to have agency over their own lives. Instead, I have strived to understand how each girl defines her own version of 'girl power' and what 'empowerment' means for her, which will be further examined throughout this study. My aim has always been to offer a platform for girls to voice their lived experiences as they grapple with questions around identity, gender, and power.

I also acknowledge that in terms of race, class, and nationality, I have a vastly different background than the participants of my study. These differences certainly create power dynamics in a relationship between a white, Northern, financially secure woman and those of a black, African, girl living in financial poverty. I realize that I will never be able to fully understand what it means to be a mother, worker, daughter, lover, etc. in the Ugandan context. I also understand that some may view me and my work as a 'missionary' for girl power as mentioned above (Sensoy & Marshall, 2010). Feminist and post-colonial theorists (Mohanty, 1991; Said, 1978; Sensoy & Marshall, 2010) who are immersed in issues of recreating representations of the 'Other', have a valid critique of the way Northern researchers have misrepresented the 'Other'.

In response to the issues arising from my positionality, throughout the research process I actively worked to create an environment where the participants felt as comfortable as possible to erase some of the power differentials. I also aimed to create room for participants to feel empowered to express their own truths. This required me to "be willing to do the kind of personal sharing as is encouraged from other participants" (Rowlands, 1995, p. 104). Thus, I started many of the interviews by telling my own story of growing up and the challenges I faced, acknowledging the similarities and differences between the US and Uganda.

At the same time, scholars such as Mutema (2003) argue that there are benefits for research to be done by outsiders. He places emphasis on indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and argues that although IKS is situated knowledge gained through life experiences, language, and

proximity, the researcher does not necessarily have to be indigenous or African to understand IKS. Rather, indigenous scholarship is earned through research and a reciprocal exchange of views within indigenous communities. Following Mutema's description, I consciously worked to be an outsider with unjudging listening capabilities to allow for an honest and open reciprocal exchange of views.

Therefore, my involvement with GUIU allowed me to inhabit the space of 'insider', yet given my background and life experiences I also had an 'outsider' viewpoint. It was my hope, then, that this research would contribute to indigenous scholarship through my close collaboration and exchange of ideas and views within the local community, particularly with the GUIU team. This required an honest awareness and acknowledgement of my background and how this could create certain power dynamics that had to be constantly negotiated and treated with care and attention. While I spent much time working and living in Kampala prior to conducting this research, there were always new situations I faced that required acceptance and awareness of my privilege and power. With this acceptance and awareness, I intended to illustrate how 'outsiders' like myself with 'insider' access to indigenous knowledge bases could offer a space for adolescent girls to speak their truth and be heard.

5 Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, I present the main findings from the gathered data. Data collected through in-depth interviews with adolescent girls serves as the main body of research findings and is complemented with findings from the field notes and secondary sources. This chapter is divided by themes and within each theme, by grouping - intervention and control group. This allows for comparison of the two groups in the discussion sections, which examines the implications of the findings in terms of the previous literature and the empowerment theory.

5.1 Generational Poverty

One of the most striking aspects of the findings from the interview data was that despite its absence in the interview guide, the issue of lack of money, and specifically money to pay for school fees was discussed in the majority of the interviews (seven out of ten) conducted with participants in both the control and intervention group. This was undoubtedly connected to the reality that all participants live in an urban slum area without adequate shelter, water, and electricity and with parents or guardians that struggle to provide basic food, medical, and education for their children.[6]

5.1.1 Struggle for School Fees

Control Group

It was significant that most of the girls had only one working parent with an unstable job such as house cleaner, market woman, and small shop keeper. This meant that participants were accustomed to the daily realities of living in a context of poverty and with the constant struggle to pay school fees. At the control school, school fees cost 70,000 UGX (approximately 21 USD) per term with three terms in one year. Two of the five girls in the control group expressed 'being chased' from or forced to leave school because they hadn't paid school fees in time:

> *I have not yet paid my school fees and on Monday we are starting our exams.*
> *They will chase me out of school. (Winnie)*

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[6] My experience of living in the same community as the participants gave me a deep insight into the daily challenges that arise in this area from lack of street lights to walk safely at night to regular water and power outages. Certainly, my reality was different because I had the financial means to try to ease the discomfort of living in an impoverished area by for instance, buying water when the water was out.

> *I was chased when I first came here to school. I was weak and knew nothing. I didn't even know how to write the letter 'A'. (Farid)*

In both instances, the participants were responding to other questions that were unrelated to poverty and school fees. For instance, Winnie was discussing living with her aunt and how she was happy that Winnie was in school, yet couldn't afford to pay her school fees. The issue of school fees, then, cannot be dismissed when looking at girls' experiences of being in school.

Intervention Group

All five girls in the intervention group mentioned their struggle with school fees in various contexts. At the intervention school, school fees were 72,000 UGX (approximately 22 USD) per term. Eighty percent (four of five girls) received school scholarships as part of the intervention. The organization runs a school scholarship program for participants of the Girl Up Clubs who are at high risk of dropping out of school. GUIU commits to paying girls' school fees until they graduate from primary school and works closely with girls' parents to support their daughter's education. Interview participants shared how the scholarship program has eased their struggles with school fees:

> *My father refused to pay my school fees. Girl Up paid for my school fees and I am proud of that. (Grace)*

> *They used to chase me a lot in school for school fees, but since Girl Up entered I'm not being chased anymore. (Margret)*

> *Some girls do not go to school because they lack school fees. But Girl Up pays my school fees. They used to chase me for school fees, but now they don't chase me. (Vivian)*

Priscilla, the one girl in the intervention group who did not receive a scholarship[7] explained that paying for school fees is her biggest challenge:

> *Sometimes they chase me and I tell the teacher to excuse me so I can bring the school fees. My mother told me that if she gets a job, she can pay my school fees. But if she doesn't get a job, she cannot pay for me. Life at home is not good because my mother struggles to pay for school fees and food. (Priscilla)*

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[7] At least ten girls a year are supported with a school scholarship, and this number increases based on the organization's funding. Therefore, securing a scholarship is competitive. Monica explained that before a girl receives a scholarship, they do a thorough selection process by meeting with the parents and assessing the need.

On the day of the interview, Priscilla looked more upset and sad than normal, especially when we discussed the issue of school fees. The week before, I had observed her when she came by the office with her friends and she was upbeat and positive. After the interview, I spoke with Gloria who told me that she was distressed because her mother was unable to pay her school fees. Priscilla's story highlights how the lack of access to formal education due to inability to pay school fees can cause significant distress for adolescent girls.

5.1.2 Education = Social Mobility

Control Group

Another aspect related to girls' experiences of being in school was the common perception and belief that receiving an education would enable them to improve their social status relative to their current social position. Being educated would enable them to escape the generational poverty that marks every aspect of their lives and widen their possibilities. When asked what they wanted to do when they grew up, eighty percent (four of five participants) replied with careers that require higher education: lawyer, doctor, or judge.[8] All of the professional dreams differentiated them from those of their parents. In this way, the level of education and occupation pushed the girls to pursue a different life path than their parents. Farid shared how her mother works at a saloon and never finished primary school, only going up to Primary 4 level. She explained how she feels when she wears her school uniform:

> *I feel good because I have the choice to come to school, but for my mom she didn't. I feel good and I just pray that I finish and not become like my mom. (Farid)*

Farid showed an understanding of the link between education and securing better types of work. She stated that she wants to be a lawyer when she grows up to help suffering people.

Similarly, Agnes explained how she does not want to be like her father. She has a strained relationship with him and in describing his negative character, she pointed out how he was uneducated and unemployed as an example of his lower economic class:

> *My dad is very complicated. He didn't go to school and he's just there. Now, if I try talking to him he's a liar. You can't understand him. (Agnes)*

---

[8] The outlier response was from Sheila who explained that she wanted to become a model, which would increase her social mobility, however, higher education is not necessary for this profession.

Agnes made a connection between her father's lack of formal schooling and his inability to get work ('he's just there').

Intervention Group

Similar to the control group, the intervention group believed that continuing their education to the university level would improve their economic realities and social class. Completing primary school was viewed as an accomplishment that not all girls would achieve:

> *I am proud that I finished even P7 because people did not think that I would finish. Even now I am shaming them because I finished. (Grace)*

Grace is proud of her accomplishment because despite the pessimism that surrounded her during her schooling, she completed primary school. Six months prior, in June 2017, I observed an incident when Grace came to the Girl Up office to speak with Monica. As she began to explain her problems, she started to cry and Monica continued to counsel her. When I asked Monica what happened, she told me that Grace did not take her mid-term exams because she feared failing. Her teacher became angry and called Grace's aunt, whom she lives with[9]. Grace did not know what to do so she ran to the Girl Up office. Monica settled the matter with the teacher so that Grace could take the exam the following week. This story exemplifies the types of challenges that girls like Grace face throughout primary school and how completing school is a notable milestone. Even though Grace was not planning to go further with her formal education (she wanted to become a hair stylist), she was still proud that she proved to others that she could complete primary school.

While Grace wished to become a hair stylist, the other four out of five participants, or eighty percent, planned to have careers that required university degrees: doctor, lawyer, and Girl Up coach[10]. Two of the girls mentioned that they wanted to become a Girl Up coach to help others as they had been helped:

> *When I grow up, I want to be a coach of Girl Up. I want to help other girls because some girls are too young to get pregnant. Some of them get pregnant in school. When they produce, their mother could beat them, asking, 'Why do you produce when you are still young' And the girl, even if it is a mistake, the mother or stepmother could take the baby and not give you food, school fees,*

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[9] Monica explained that Grace's mother has mental health problems and it is believed that Grace was conceived through rape. Her mother lives in a village outside of Kampala and family members decided to send Grace to the city to live with her aunt for safety reasons.

[10] The two Program Officers that manage the Girl Up Clubs both have university degrees from Makerere University, the largest and most reputable university in Uganda.

and books. Most of the girls get pregnant because they lack people to guide them and talk to them. I want to be that person who talks to them. (Priscilla)

Besides providing participants with information and knowledge, the Girl Up coaches offer the girls another professional path to pursue. Their function as role models will be discussed further in 5.3.3. Participants in the intervention group addressed the importance of a career that would enable them to help other girls like them.

5.1.3 Skills Development as a Tool for Economic Empowerment

This section only includes the findings from the intervention group since the control group did not receive skills development from the Girl Up Club, or any other similar intervention.

Intervention Group

All five participants in the intervention group discussed the development of skills as an avenue to escape generational poverty and provide economically for themselves. In recognition of the high unemployment and poverty that impact almost every aspect of an adolescent girls' life in the slums of Kampala, GUIU included hands-on skills training in the Girl Up Club curriculum. In an informal discussion, Monica explained that girls need to be provided with marketable skills because of the reality that many of the girls will not be able to afford university, and even if they graduate from university, it is unlikely that they will obtain gainful employment directly after completion. Therefore, GUIU found that it was crucial that the girls learn skills to begin a small business and start earning money. In the Girl Up Club, each girl learns how to make bags, jewelry, notebooks, biomass briquettes[11], and reusable sanitary pads. The girls expressed the value of the skills-based intervention:

> *If I grow up and don't have any money, I can make my own pads when I'm in my menstruation. Instead of buying charcoal, I can make my own charcoal by using charcoal dust, plus soil, and cassava flour. I can even make my own bangles and sell them. (Vivian)*
>
> *They teach us many skills, even skills to start a business so that if you have never gone to school you can get income. (Grace)*

---

[11] Biomass briquettes are low-cost, clean energy alternatives to fossil fuels, such as charcoal, which is the most commonly used in Uganda.

I used to not know skills like how to make bags and pads. But now Girl Up came and told us that even if you are young, you can do your own business. (Margret)

Beyond understanding entrepreneurship in terms of future income, one of the girls exemplified how she had already begun to use her new skills to earn money. Priscilla, who was mentioned earlier as the only girl who did not receive a school scholarship through GUIU, explained how she started to sell bags to pay for her school fees:

They teach us that a girl whom they tell 'don't go to school' has a right to go to school. So, you can make a business through making bags or mats and that money you can take it to your teacher. So, I got threads and I started making bags. That money which I got from the bags I gave to the teachers and I told them to put it towards my school fees. (Priscilla)

This use of skills to lessen the struggle for school fees, was reiterated by Margret:

If I don't have school fees I will do handiwork because for handiwork you can get money. (Margret)

In addition to learning how to make handicrafts to sell for income, the girls also learned how to produce their own pack of reusable sanitary pads. The price for a pack of 8 one-time use pads in a local shop costs 3,500 UGX (approximately 1 USD), which is a high price for a family living in poverty. Most girls instead used old clothing or toilet paper, and often missed days of school because of the pains or because of the shame and embarrassment of bleeding in class as is depicted in Photo 5.1.

Photo 5.1: Informational Material on Menstruation used by GUIU

In 2015, GUIU introduced the making of reusable sanitary pads into its programming after finding in its baseline study that one out of three girls who had already begun menstruation missed at least one day of school per month because of her menstruation. During my discussions with the head female teachers at the two schools, they reiterated that they spend much of their time supporting girls with issues related to menstruation. At the intervention school, the teacher explained that she has a box of donated pads that she gives out to girls in need, however, it was not a sufficient supply to meet the constant demand. Therefore, she has been one of the biggest advocates for GUIU's reusable pads project and regularly joins the session.

Brenda agreed with the importance of building skills in making reusable sanitary pads:

> *Girl Up has made me learn many things that I didn't know like making pads. There are situations when you need pads, but there is no money. But if you have materials you can make your own pads." (Brenda)*

While all participants lived in a context of extreme poverty, the girls in the intervention group were empowered economically through gaining the skills and knowledge to make their own products and pads to earn an income, no matter how small. It was clear that GUIU provided the girls with a sense of economic empowerment where they could gain control over their precarious situation.

5.1.4 Discussion

The first section of the findings illustrates how generational poverty, with its challenges and possibilities, plays a significant role in how adolescent girls make meaning of their schooling. Besides the difference in discussing skills building from GUIU, the other main aspects of generational poverty: school fees struggle and perception that education leads one to social mobility, were found within both groups. The participants made sense of their daily realities and its relation to their educational attainment in similar manners. For all girls, the road to a better life was paved through education, yet the lack of money for school fees created a constant roadblock.

As displayed in the literature, poverty continues to serve as a strong factor in affecting girls' access to and retention in schooling in Uganda (Brock-Utne, 2000; Jones, 2011; Kabesiime, 2010; Mpyangu et al., 2014). All participants in the study came from poor backgrounds in slum areas with one, or no, working parent. Living in a slum with a poor standard of living exposes

one to a constant state of vulnerability (Nalule, 2015). This meant that poverty was a continual struggle in the girls' lives and especially in regards to having the funds to pay school fees and stay in school. Therefore, it was not shocking that despite no direct questioning about school fees and poverty, this topic organically presented itself in the interviews. The girls showed signs of distress given the constant worry of being 'chased' from school for not paying school fees. Despite government proclamations of free education, it is clear that in line with Lewis and Sabates' (2012) research, wealth disparities continue to contribute to large gaps in educational access.

Participants in both the control and intervention group also exhibited an awareness that education was the key to their social mobility and improved social status. By using the life experiences of their parents as an example of an undesirable life characterized by hardship and poverty, school represented an opportunity and a possibility for a more promising future. This is in line with the findings from Holmarsdottir et al. (2011) where for girls in South Sudan and South Africa education represented a hope for the future and the possibility of change. The girls also illustrated a belief in the connection between their ongoing schooling and an improved economic future and in this way supported the human capital discourse in which humans are presumed to act in their own economic best interests (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). Rather than discuss the intrinsic benefits of being in school, the majority of participants referred to the improved economic situation they would experience after graduating from school. Grace was the only girl who did not have ambitions to be in a higher paid profession. For her, the act of graduating from primary school was enough to build up her social status, particularly to prove to others that she was capable. As Stambach (2000) explains schooling can be seen as a substitute for marriage in the social status it provides to girls, and as a result it reduces the need for and dependency on the social capital that comes from husbands.

In the previous section 5.1.3, the value of learning hands-on practical skills in making products for personal use or for income generation was a significant finding. In a country where unemployment rates are extremely high, even those with university degrees struggle to find gainful employment. Therefore, early on, GUIU included skills building into the Girl Up Club programming in response to this challenge. Again, in the interview guide there was no specific question related to this aspect of the program, but nevertheless all five intervention group participants mentioned the hands-on skill building as a crucial learning area of the Girl Up Club.

The girls in the study illustrated how they learned to make various products that were directly linked to their retention in school. For instance, the skill in learning how to make reusable pads was highly relevant to the girls retention in school. Girls explained how they are now able to make their own pads when they don't have money to buy them. This echoes Jones (2011) finding that all 13 girls in her study had missed school due to menstruation and her argument that the "provision of sanitary materials is necessary if girls are to have equitable educational opportunities" (Jones, 2011, pg. 396). Similarly, the participants explained how they used their skills for income generation to pay for their school fees. This shows the value girls place on learning new income generation skills that provide them with the opportunity to stay in school while surviving in a context of generational poverty and gender inequalities. This finding is supported by the study on BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents program (Bandiera et al., 2012) that found that combining life skills education with vocational training was more effective than single-pronged interventions.

In terms of the economic dimension of empowerment, it can be argued that the stories of all the girls illustrate the importance of economic empowerment at the individual and relational level. While the income that they earned from the handicrafts was not substantial, they were still increasing their incomes and in that way they were less dependent on their parents and more capable of making independent financial decisions. Therefore, the nature of their relationships with their parents was transformed by their new economic self-reliance. Economic empowerment was mostly enabled through girls' increased income, which made them less dependent on their parents and more capable of making autonomous decisions.

As imagined, none of the participants mentioned their domestic work in terms of economic "work" given the dominant neo-liberal regime where unpaid economic activities within or outside of the household are not taken into account (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003; Stromquist, 2015b; Syed, 2010). This echoes Holmardottir et al.'s (2011) findings that the girls in their study did not view domestic work as 'real work'. Stromquist (2015b) points out that "this is a major challenge to the successful design and implementation of economic empowerment strategies today" (p. 311) and particularly when adolescent girls are the target group for such economic empowerment interventions. Despite the Girl Up Club's focus on gender and power relations, the girls were not collectively economically empowered to work towards larger societal change. They did not challenge the burden of domestic chores in regards to economic

disparities, but more from the angle of gender inequality, which will be discussed in the following section.

The stories of the girls illustrated that they simultaneously experienced moments of economic empowerment and disempowerment. While they never used the concept 'empowerment' in the telling of their stories, they exemplified the disempowering moments of the ongoing struggle to pay school fees, yet within the challenge the girls also found moments of creative empowerment, when they used the practical skills they learned to cover their school fees. The notion that education serves as the key to a more promising future can also be viewed as an empowering moment for the girls. This supports the findings of Holmarsdottir et al. (2011) that school was empowering for the girls because it gave them the hope that one day they would finish school and get a job so they could be independent and live a life of their own choice.

5.2 Gender Inequality

This study is primarily concerned with understanding the meanings that adolescent girls attach to being a girl in the primary school setting, and how it can be a (dis)empowering environment for girls as they develop their own senses of self and identity. At the same time, through the research process, it became evident that the other environments where a girl lives, learns, and grows are also significant to assess how gender differences and inequalities are perceived and experienced by girls. In these spaces, gender norms perpetuate insecurities and feelings of unsafety. The underlying root cause of this (un)conscious gender inequality is the strongly held cultural stereotypes and expectations of how a girl is supposed to act, what she is supposed to do, who she is supposed to spend her time with, etc. that permeates throughout all facets of a girl's life.

5.2.1 School Environment

Control Group

For the girls in the control group, their experiences of being a girl in school were generally positive. All girls thought that the school environment was either a positive or neutral space. None of these girls mentioned cases of sexual harassment or abuse in schools. Eighty percent (four out of five girls) stated that they were not treated any differently than the boys in their school. The following quote demonstrates the shared perception of equality in the school

environment:

At school, there's no difference between girls and boys. (Sheila)

The only exception was Farid who pointed out that being a girl was preferable to being a boy in relation to trust and relationships with teachers:

Interviewer: What is it like to be a girl in school? Do you think it's much different than being a boy?
Farid: Yeah.
I: How come?
F: Because sometimes girls can trust them with things that they can't trust boys with.
I: Girls can trust each other?
F: Kali [yes], even your teachers. They can trust you so much more than boys.
I: So, teachers trust the girls more?
F: Yeah.

Farid's positive experience is reflected in my observational data that showed how teachers, particularly female teachers, preferred to collaborate with female students over male students because they perceived them as more honest and trustworthy.

Intervention Group

The intervention group had a varied experience of the school environment with sixty percent (three out of five girls) believing that gender inequalities existed in the way that girls were treated differently than boys. For one participant, this was dependent on the individual teacher in questions. She explained:

For us girls we have some disadvantages. Not every teacher treats us the same. Especially those teachers which are males, they touch you. (Margret)

Margret continued to describe this incident of sexual harassment below:

Interviewer: Really, they touch you?
Margret: Yeah and you feel you are not comfortable with the place. And say, 'Eh. I wish I was a boy. That would not happen.'
I: So, the teachers, where do they touch you?
M: They come and touch you. They tie your shirt when your shirt is already buttoned. Then they start opening it again. And again they open and tie, they open and tie. So, that can make someone feel not good and not comfortable in school.
I: Were you able to report this incident?
M: I told him to his face, 'I don't like what you're doing. I am a girl and you should not do that to me. If you want to tell me to tie, you shall stand in a far

distance and I shall stand here and you can tell me what you want to tell me.
But no touching me anywhere.'
I: What did he say?
M: He just told me that, 'You, you are very stupid. You don't know things. Now
for you, you think…' And I say, 'Yeah. You are touching me before I accepted
it.'
I: Do you think it affects your marks?
M: Yeah, it can affect my marks. Like it can very much affect a girl's marks.
There's a school where if you don't have sex with the head teacher you will not
pass. He will fail you even if you have passed.
I: In primary school?
M: Yes. You will not pass.
I: You have friends who go there or how do you know this?
M: How I know this is because I had a friend in that school. So, she used to tell
me what she went through there. I tried to tell my mom and my mom said, 'You
are not the one experiencing that thing.' But I told her, 'I am a girl like her and
anything can happen to me.' And I told my friend, 'You tell your teacher
straightforward. Tell him that you don't like what he's doing to you.'
I: Did she do it?
M: Yeah, she did it.
I: What happened?
M: The teacher left her alone and they even chased away the teacher.

In Margret's account, she illustrated how she confidently voiced her opinion to her teacher, mother, and friend. She was not afraid to confront the teacher and tell her friend to report the case of sexual harassment and abuse. During the interview, Margret also exemplified this confidence in her body language as she told the stories with bold energy and pride for speaking up for what she thought was right. Brenda also discussed a case of sexual violence that she heard about in her community:

Brenda: I heard about a teacher at another school nearby our school called
Biina Islamic. The male teacher raped a girl.
Interviewer: What happened?
B: They arrested him.
I: So, she reported?
B: Yes.

For Margret and Brenda, the school environment was not viewed as a safe place for girls given the sexual harassment, abuse, and rape they faced because of their gender. Nevertheless, contrary to this opinion of gender inequality in school, two other participants in the intervention group stated that there was no difference for school girls and school boys in their experience of schooling:

We are not treated differently because we have equal opportunities. Even some
boys they don't go to school. We all face problems of school fees, problems of

not getting equal opportunities. Long ago, girls would not go to school, only boys would go. But now, all of us can go to school. (Vivian)

Vivian explained that there is gender equality in school based on the shared issues of poverty and paying school fees. She also illustrated her historical knowledge of the improvement of girls' access to schooling from the past until now.

5.2.2 Household Environment

Control Group

While the school environment was perceived to be a space of gender equality, the situation at the household level was understood to be less gender equal. All participants (five out of five) explained that they had to complete domestic chores (washing, cleaning, cooking) before and/or after going to school. A typical school day for a girl is described below:

When I wake up before I go to school, I first do some work like helping my auntie wash utensils[12]. Then I mop the house before coming to school. Then when I go back home, I help my auntie cook supper, then I iron my uniform. (Winnie)

Domestic chores are unequally distributed between boys and girls in the home. When thinking of the differences between boys and girls, one girl stated:

There are things I wouldn't do if I was a man. I wouldn't wash clothes or cook or wash utensils. I wouldn't do all of that. (Farid)

None of the girls in the control group questioned this unequal distribution of housework as a negative or unfair aspect of being a girl. Rather the duty of housework was expressed with a sense of acceptance of the way things are, should be, and always will be.

In the same way that the participants accepted that women and girls' role is to complete domestic chores, they shared the belief that men have the responsibility to financially 'take care of the family':

It would be different if I was a boy because I would have to take care of my family. (Farid)

This was supported by Winnie when she described the difference:

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[12] Utensils refer to all kitchen, eating, and cooking utensils.

> *When boys grow up they have a lot of responsibilities, but when girls grow up they don't have the same responsibilities. (Winnie)*

The girls' perception of the word 'responsibility' and what it means to 'take care of the family' referred solely to the responsibility of a man to economically provide for the family. A woman's unpaid domestic care role in the home to cook, clean, and wash was not given the same recognition and acknowledgement as a core 'responsibility' in the home environment.

Intervention Group

In relation to gender inequalities in the home environment, all girls in the intervention group similarly mentioned how the burden of domestic work is a responsibility that falls solely on the shoulders of the girls and women. However, among the intervention participants, they illustrated an ability to question the unfair distribution of work between girls and boys. Margret stresses this in her explanation of housework:

> *Interviewer: Is there a difference between what girls and boys have to do in the home?*
> *Margret: The difference is that we girls, we do all the domestic work and the boys fetch water. The boy in the morning wakes up and brushes his teeth and goes to fetch water, like two jerry cans and puts them at home and goes and plays. But, a girl can waste all her time doing the domestic work and when she is finished she is tired and just wants to rest. Boys have time for playing.*
> *I: Ok. So, what's your biggest challenge would you say as a girl?*
> *M: My biggest challenge is that parents should learn how to give girls the same time as they give to boys. If I'm doing my housework, my brother should come and share the work even if he's a boy. He will say, 'I will wash plates and sweep the compound and fetch water.' Then for you, you will say, 'I will mop the house and cook food and go and fetch water also.' There it is equally. Everything you do is equal.*
> *I: Yeah. And have you ever told your mom that?*
> *M: I've told her, but she said that, 'boys are sharper than girls'. And she claims that my brother is sharper than me.*

This account demonstrates how Margret questions gender expectations and norms and believes that it is unfair that a girl must 'waste all her time doing the domestic work' while 'boys have time to play'. This commonplace experience of gender inequality in the home pressed her to recommend to all parents to split the domestic work equally between their daughters and sons. It is also noteworthy that Margret holds these beliefs even while her mother believes that boys are more intelligent than boys.

Despite the gender imbalance in domestic chores, forty percent (two out of the five girls) did not think there was any difference in the way that boys and girls are viewed and valued in the home:

> *Some families like boys more than girls, and some families like girls more than boys. (Vivian)*

Vivian explained that in her family boys and girls have the same opportunities with gender playing no part in how the children are treated.

The remaining sixty percent of participants claimed that one's gender differentiates how boys and girls are viewed and valued. Boys are seen to have the unique ability and responsibility to 'help their mothers in the future':

> *Things would be different if I was a boy because they say that when boys grow up they can go to school and learn. Girls cannot help their mothers in the future. But, in the future, boys can help their mothers. For me, I think girls can help their mothers in the future. (Priscilla)*

Similar to how Margret questioned the distribution of domestic work in the home, Priscilla critically examined the difference between what 'they say' and what she finds 'for me'. In this way, she illustrated her ability to critically think beyond gendered expectations and beliefs that only men can provide for their families or mothers[13].

5.2.3 Discussion

This findings section has illustrated girls' perceptions of gender inequality and differences in the school and household environments. In relation to how girls perceived gender inequalities in the way they were treated in school, there was a clear discrepancy between the control (twenty percent) and intervention group (eighty percent). It is interesting to note that the one girl in the control group who noticed gender inequalities in school, discussed how girls were treated better than boys in school.

None of the girls in the control group told stories of sexual violence experienced by girls in the schools. However, two girls in the intervention group gave examples of sexual harassment, abuse and rape. This finding supports other studies that have found that rather than being safe

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[13] The role of the mother is very highly regarded in Uganda. Based on my field observations and discussions with young Ugandans, it was clear that many youth were concerned with making enough money to provide for their mothers in the future.

and conducive learning environments for girls, schools are places of sexual exploitation and abuse of girls (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2013; Dunne et al., 2006; Jones, 2011; Manzini-Henwood et al., 2015; Mirembe & Davies, 2001; MoES, 2013; Muhanguzi, 2011). It is noteworthy that only the girls in the intervention group mentioned specific cases of sexual harassment and violence, which is likely a result of the Girl Up Club's focus on the issue of gender-based violence, how to identify it, and what to do if one experiences violence (GUIU, 2018).

However, contrary to existing literature that found weak school support structures for responding to allegations of sexual harassment (Mirembe & Davis, 2001; Muhanguzi, 2011) in two out of the three cases that were described by the study participants, the male teachers who were suspected of sexual abuse were either "chased out" or arrested after the girls reported the incidents. This exemplifies that the girls felt confident in reporting sexual abuse cases with the knowledge that they would be dealt with. In the other case, Margret illustrated how she took action on her own when her male teacher tried to touch her. Rather than feeling silenced to express such experiences, these girls' narratives showed the opposite - that when equipped with knowledge of their rights and improved self-confidence, they attempted to deal with the problem themselves or to report the cases to other teachers or to the police. This reinforces Manzini-Henwood et al.'s (2015) finding from Swaziland that the school-based club approach led to an increase in girls who reported cases of sexual harassment and abuse experienced either at school or in the community as well as Marcus and Page's (2014) finding that non-formal education led to adolescent girls speaking out and challenging discriminatory gender norms.

The gendered dynamics in the school environment can be viewed as a reflection of the way girls are treated in the community at large, and in the home in particular. Girls' increased access to schooling does not automatically reflect the disappearance of gender as a discriminating marker in their societies (Stromquist, 2013). The home as an institution is critical in an exploration of gender inequality given that the majority of adolescent girls spend nearly all, if not all, of their free time at home.[14] For this study, girls' perceptions of domestic work was used as a way to gain a deeper understanding of their awareness of gender inequalities in the household environment and to assess how domestic work affected their schooling. All

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[14] At the time of the study, there was a rise of murder and kidnapping rates of young girls in Kampala, so parents were hesitant to even send their daughters to Girl Up Club sessions.

participants provided narratives of the domestic chores that they were expected to complete before and after attending school, which was unequally distributed by gender.

This finding supports the abundance of earlier research on the unequal burden of domestic work among women and girls in the household (Duflo, 2012; Holmarsdottir et al., 2011; Jones, 2011; Lowicki-Zucca et al., 2013; Stromquist, 2001; Stromquist, 2015b). As Stromquist (2015b) states, "women nearly everywhere perform more work in the household than men, an imbalance that emerges early in their lives and increases as girls become older" (p. 311). Nonetheless, contrary to other studies (MoES, 2013), when asked if they had adequate time to study at home, all participants explained that their domestic duties did not interfere with their time for schoolwork.

In comparing the narratives given by the control and intervention group, the most notable difference was the level of awareness of the unequal gender dynamics at the household level. A higher percentage of participants in the intervention group (60 percent) were aware of the unequal share of domestic chores they were expected to complete compared to the boys in their family. With this awareness, the girls were able to challenge the status quo in the household. Margret exemplified this in her narrative when she explained how she told her mother that the housework should be shared equally between the boys and girls in her family. In comparison, none of the girls in the control group questioned this unequal distribution of domestic labor.

Looking through the lens of the empowerment theoretical framework, the remarks from the three girls in the intervention group illustrated political empowerment at the individual and relational level through their challenge of the gendered social norms that govern the unequal division of household labor. Rather than focusing solely on political empowerment at the collective macro-level in terms of being elected as a political representative[15], Stromquist (2015b) explains that unremunerated work at the household level is a crucial element of women's political empowerment and must be considered a major target of social change. The above presented narratives from Margret and Priscilla demonstrate how the girls in the Girl Up Clubs are critically engaging and questioning gender norms and expectations. In the same vein, Margret's assertion that domestic work should be shared equally echoes the feminist

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[15] Since this study is primarily concerned with the experiences of adolescent girls, the role of political positions is not relevant. However, information about the girls' leadership (political) positions at the school level could have provided useful additional information and as a limitation, it is recommended for this exploration in further studies on girls' education and empowerment.

perspective that the major changes needed in domestic work should focus on the sharing of domestic responsibilities, not on the revalorization of care (Stromquist, 2015b).

Above all, the boldness to openly defy gender stereotypes exhibited by the girls in the intervention group, as opposed to the acceptance by the girls in the control group, has implications for this study's question around how the AGC model as a form of non-formal education has the ability to engage with girls in constructing new gendered meanings and identities. The following chapter will shed further light on the findings in relation to empowerment and how this concept is perceived by the girls in the different groups.

5.3 Empowerment

The concept of empowerment and how it is perceived and experienced by adolescent girls is a key area of this study. It was significant to find out how this widely-used concept in the international development sector is understood by the beneficiaries themselves, the adolescent girls. This was especially relevant in regards to how they make meaning of empowerment in relation to their behaviors and attitudes. In this section, I also include findings on the part that role models and supportive adults play in the lives of the girls as a form of relational empowerment. For the intervention group, the data is much richer and in-depth than for the control group since there were additional questions about the intervention - the Girl Up Club - which focuses on empowering girls. Therefore, the last section 5.3.4. represents the findings from only the intervention group.

5.3.1 Meanings and Experiences of 'Empowerment'

Control Group

In the interviews, all participants were asked if they had heard of the concept 'empowerment' and if so, what they thought it means and if they think they are empowered. Out of the control group, only forty percent (two out of the five girls) stated that they had heard of the word before. Sheila, one of the participants that had heard of the word before, explained her version of 'power over' (Rowlands, 1997) in relation to individual political power:

> *Sheila: Empowerment means having a lot of power over something.*
> *Interviewer: Power over something?*
> *S: Yes.*
> *I: Do you think that you're empowered?*

S: No.
I: Who do you think is empowered?
S: The President.
I: The President. Is he the only person?
S: And the mayors.
I: The mayors, ok.

For Sheila, empowerment was experienced by politicians, not by girls like herself. On the contrary, Farid explained her meaning of empowerment and how it related to her experience as a girl:

> *Farid: Empowerment means when you're confident, when you trust in yourself, and you think, 'I can do this.' When you advise yourself, when you don't put yourself down. That's what I think.*
> *Interviewer: Would you call yourself empowered? Would you say 'I'm an empowered girl'?*
> *F: Yes.*
> *I: Are there certain times when you feel more empowered than other times?*
> *F: Yeah.*
> *I: What are those times?*
> *F: I reached a moment when I was going to stop coming to school. But I just said 'No, I'm not going to stop. I'm going to keep on. I have to just pray.' And it never happened. Still I'm here, I'm coming to school. But some people they told me, 'No, you're not going to study, just go back. You're not going to start. Just give up.' But I never gave up.*

The definition of empowerment from Farid is closely aligned to the notion of individual psychological power from within. In her definition, she uses significant words and concepts such as 'confident', 'trust in yourself' and 'going to keep on' that exemplify an inner self of worth, confidence, and capacity.

Intervention Group

In the intervention group, eighty percent (four out of five girls) had an idea of what 'empowerment' means. The following were the participants' answers to what empowerment means to them:

> *Empowerment. It's like power that you have in your hands. To empower yourself. (Grace)*

> *Interviewer: What do you think empowerment means?*
> *Brenda: Giving people power.*
> *I: What kind of power?*
> *B: Like if you study badly and you get a bad report and you don't want to go back home. Then your friend tells you that, 'Don't fear. Your mother will not*

beat you. But study hard for the next time to get a good result.' She's trying to tell her friend to be empowered.

Interviewer: I'm wondering if you have heard of the word 'empowerment'?
Margret: Empowerment. I've heard it. To empower girls.
I: What do you think it means?
M: It's like empower means to help girls put in more effort to do what they want to do or to reach their goals.

Interviewer: What do you think of the word 'empowerment' when you hear it?
Vivian: Empowerment means that if you can talk for yourself, you are empowered.
I: What does it mean to be an empowered girl? If you see a girl, how would you know that she's empowered?
V: She can talk for herself. When she has body confidence. And when she can say 'no' to early sex and marriage. Because some parents they can force you to go and marry, when for you, you don't want to.

The participants' perceptions of empowerment varied in how they understood it at an individual, relational, and collective level. While Grace and Vivian expressed empowerment in personal terms 'to empower yourself' and 'you are empowered' respectively, Brenda and Margaret explained empowerment as an action the collective takes 'to empower girls'. Vivian also described empowerment at the relational level in the example of challenging the nature of the parent/child relationship and decisions made within it. The nuances of this difference will be explored further in the discussion section below.

When asked if they considered themselves to be empowered, all four girls answered affirmatively:

Interviewer: Do you think that you're empowered?
Grace: Yes, of course.
I: What do you think makes you empowered?
G: Girl Up.
I: What does Girl Up do that makes you feel empowered?
G: They teach us many skills, like they teach us how a girl should care for herself. Girl Up has helped me. I am proud of Girl Up by the way.

I am empowered because If my friend wants to join Girl Up, but she's shy, I tell her, 'Let's go and talk to the coaches. Then, join.' (Brenda)

I'm empowered because in the past, I used to not know that a girl should be confident, a girl should be straightforward, she should be assertive, not passive. So, for me what I do, I'm confident, that's why I'm saying I'm very empowered. (Margret)

I am empowered. We have boys at school, they can come and tell you that 'You are beautiful.' But, our coaches they told us that if any boy tells you that you are beautiful you can say that 'Even me, I know that I am beautiful and my mother told me that I am beautiful so don't tell me.' But some girls, if they say that, 'You are beautiful' she starts to think, 'Yeah, I am beautiful'. But, me, I can tell him in a big voice, 'I know that I am beautiful. Don't tell me.' (Vivian)

The responses indicate that girls' meanings and experiences of empowerment are again understood within the individual, relational, and collective level and primarily in the knowledge and psychological dimension. When asked about experiences of empowerment in spatial terms, the girls explained how they felt empowered at the Girl Up office and illustrated differing views of the school and home environment:

In Girl Up I am more empowered than at home. Because at home you are just on your own, but here they teach you, you can do everything when you are empowered.
 (Margret)

Interviewer: Are there certain places where you feel more powerful than others?
Brenda: Like at Girl Up and at home.
I: At school, do you feel powerful?
B: Sometimes.

At Girl Up, I feel that I am empowered. Even at school if I finish my education, I will feel that I am empowered now. (Vivian)

This spatial understanding of empowerment compliments section 5.2 in the discussion on gender inequality in the home and school environments. The findings from the girls in the intervention group illustrate how in the contrast to unsupportive settings, the Girl Up office is experienced as a safe and empowering place.

5.3.2 "I'm proud to be a girl"

Control Group

While the girls in the control group did not explicitly describe themselves as being empowered, many of their statements reflected a feeling of individual psychological empowerment in regards to their gender identities. In explaining what it is like to be a girl at the school, community, and household level, four out of five girls in the control group were positive about their gender identity as a girl:

I like being a girl. I am confident in being a girl and I am happy to be a girl. I thank God for making me a girl. (Rebecca)

I'm proud to be a girl. (Winnie)

I thank myself for being a girl. I think it's nicer than being a boy because I feel ok. Everything is ok to me if I am a girl. And I love myself. I love what I am. I love being a girl. (Agnes)

It is significant that despite the gender inequalities that they face as girls (as mentioned in 5.2), the participants had an optimistic view of being a girl. Farid discussed the importance of women and girls in Uganda:

I want to be a girl because girls are important in our country. Without women, people can suffer because women are the people with good hearts…They just like helping. They are caring and they like sharing. Even if they have a small thing, they feel like sharing it with everyone." (Farid)

Her explanation points to the female pride in managing households even if they only have 'a small thing' to share. This also illuminates the prevalence of single female-headed households in the community. All the girls in the control group stated that they lived with a female adult (mother, aunt, or matron teacher) and only one girl, Rebecca, also lived with a male adult (father). My fieldwork observations also supported this finding. I found that most children are cared for and live with only female family members: mothers, aunts, or grandmothers. It is possible that there is also a male figure in the home, however, he is often absent and/or uninterested in spending time with his children or sharing childcare responsibilities. In most households, it continues to be the woman's responsibility to take care of the household and the children. Therefore, it is noteworthy that girls, such as Farid, are optimistic about their gender roles and find pride in this unequal household arrangement.

Intervention Group

Three of the participants in the intervention group reiterated the feelings of pride in being a girl and linked the development of pride to the Girl Up Club:

Being a girl is not something bad because you can be proud of yourself. (Margret)

Margret continued to tell the story of how the intervention improved her confidence and allowed her to be proud of herself despite her HIV status:

At Girl Up they told us, 'You have to be confident with each and everything you do. Be confident. You have to learn to say no.' Then, I said, 'if they are teaching that, that means I can tell my mom. I can ask my mom who my real dad is.' So, I went home that day and asked my mom, 'Mommy, who is my real dad?' And my mother told me, 'Who told you to come and ask me that stupid question?' I said, 'It's not a stupid question. I can't stay here without a father's love.' Then she said, 'Ok. I'm going to tell you. Your father is dead.' Then I said, 'How?' Then she tells me, 'You don't know your status.' And I said, 'Which status do I not know?' Then she tells me, 'You are not healthy. Your father died when he had given us HIV/AIDS.' Then I said, 'How? When you protected our brothers from not getting HIV and I am the one who gets it. Why?' Then she told me, 'I never knew that I had it'. The moment I got to know about my status, I hated myself. I always wanted to be alone. But with the support from the Girl Up coaches, I gained back my confidence and as I speak, I am proud of myself... I'm very proud of my Girl Up shirt. When I put on my t-shirt I'm very proud. (Margret)

Margret's story of discovering her HIV positive status illustrates the real-life effects of the intervention's teachings. It also shows how girls understand and make sense of the feeling of pride and its connection to confidence; she is proud of herself, only after gaining back her confidence.

Grace also discussed how it is common for girls as they grow up to find pride and a sense of positive identity through attracting boys and men:

Many girls are not proud of themselves. They think that it's all about those beautiful guys. They are not proud of themselves, they are proud of those guys. But, if you are proud of yourself, it is the only thing that can make you strong. (Grace)

Here she made an association between being proud of oneself and being strong. Grace continued to link her cultivation of pride to the intervention of the Girl Up Club:

If I was a boy I would not even be part of Girl Up…I am proud because I am a girl. Because I met Girl Up, I met Monica. I met all the coaches…Girl Up has made us to be proud and even teaches girls to be strong and confident, not fearing anybody (Grace)

Similarly, in her discussion of Girl Up, Vivian explained:

I'm proud to be in Girl Up because Girl Up has helped me to develop on my own. Before joining Girl Up, I used to be shy, but now I know who I am.

These three respondents used the word 'proud' in relation to being a girl and also being 'proud' of being in the Girl Up Club and wearing the Girl Up T-shirt that symbolizes their inclusion

and belonging in the club. The specific teachings and impact of the intervention will be covered in more detail in 5.3.4.

5.3.3 Role Models

Control Group

As a girl transitions from childhood to womanhood, she begins to construct her own sense of identity. Identify formation is highly influenced by the people around oneself, and in this case, the role of female adults plays a significant part in who the girls aspire to be. For this reason, I included a question about role models and supportive adults to the interview guide. The question was ungendered, however, all participants answered about female role models. In the control group, two participants answered with their aunts[16], one with her mother, one with her sister, and one with her Deputy Teacher. It was also key to understand why the girl chose this person and how this is related to a girl's sense of identity:

> *Interviewer: What do you like about your sister?*
> *Sheila: She's not quarrelsome.*
> *I: Ok. She's very peaceful?*
> *S: Yes. And she does not beat us.*
>
> *Rebecca: I want to be like my mum.*
> *Interviewer: What is it about your mom that you like?*
> *R: She's confident, she's pretty, she knows who she is.*
>
> *Interviewer: Is there someone like that in your life that really inspires you?*
> *Farid: Yes, my aunt.*
> *I: Your aunt, ok. What is it about her that you like?*
> *F: She's a confident woman and she likes helping people. Even if something is not likely to happen, for her she would say, 'It's going to happen and I am not going to give up.' She tries to get what she wants and she never gives up.*
>
> *I admire my Deputy Teacher. She is a hardworking woman. I like her ways and the things she does. I like her because of the way she talks, the way she does her things. She is so perfect. I even try to do things that she does... So, that's why I told her, 'I want to be like you' and she was like 'Yes, you can be if you know what to do.' And another day I told my brother, 'You know what, I like Deputy's things. I like the things she does.' And he was like, 'You can also be like that'. I was so happy. That's why I'm continuing doing what is right. (Agnes)*

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[16] Winnie stated that she did not have a role model, however, when she needs help and guidance she goes to her aunt: *"The only one I trust in this world is my auntie. Because ever since my parents died she took me from the village and put me in a school. She is the only person I can go to when I have problems."*

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These descriptions of the participant's role models exemplify the personality traits that the girls aim to cultivate: peaceful, confident, helpful, persistent and hard-working, with confident being used the most often by two out of five girls.

Intervention Group

In line with the responses from the control group, the participants in the intervention group all mentioned female role models despite the gender-neutral question. Eighty percent (four out of five girls)[17] answered that they look up to the Girl Up coaches. It was not a surprising finding given that this is an objective of the Girl Up Club. In a grant application from September 2017 to an external donor, the NGO writes:

> *We provide girls with inspiring young women mentors/trainers from their same community that act as 'coaches' or mentors to the girls. These female mentors have an essential role in the AGP as they provide the encouragement and leadership that allow girls to freely express themselves and develop their confidence. The Girl Up coaches also act as role models for girls that may lack positive examples of female leadership at home or at school. The trainers are all from the Nakawa Division of Kampala and have attended one of the primary schools where GUIU is active. Our coaches illustrate the futures girls can achieve if they stay in school, work hard, resist negative peer pressure, and set realistic life goals.*

This illustrates the central role the NGO places on its staff to act as role models for the girls. While the NGO has an idea of how the coaches influence the girls, it was important to understand the specific qualities the Girl Up coaches have that the girls admire:

> *Interviewer: Why do you look up to them [Coach Monica and Gloria]?*
> *Grace: They are my role models. They are smart and I like that. Smiling, confident, you know?*
>
> *Interviewer: What do you admire about Coach Hajara?*
> *Brenda: Because she's confident and she works hard to save people's lives.*
>
> *Interviewer: Do you have any role models, people you look up?*
> *Vivian: Yes. Coach Monica and our teacher, Teacher Kabumba.*
> *I: What do you like about them?*

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[17] Priscilla answered that she did not have any role models but that she consults Gloria when she is experiencing difficulties. Margret, the outlier, explained that she looks up to Queen Sheba, a famous Ugandan singer: *"I really want to be like Queen Sheba because she is not a model, she's a singer, she's even a celeb. So, if I see a video, I wish I was like that. So, I put more interest in what I'm doing so that I shall reach that thing which I want… What I like in Queen Sheba is she is brave and she has talents. She can sing, and even me I have a singing talent."*

V: Coach Monica is a woman who helps others, girls and boys, it doesn't matter. She takes all of us as equal and if you have a problem you can come and tell her and she will solve that problem. And our teacher, Teacher Kabumba. If you go to school when you are on your menstruation period don't fear. You can go and tell her that, 'Teacher, I am on my menstruation period' and she can give you pads. She can teach you how to wear that pad if you don't know.

The girls' answers exemplify the various qualities that they admire in their role models. This will be explored further in the discussion section.

5.3.4 Girl Up Club

The findings below reflect solely the data from the intervention group since they were the only participants to receive the intervention. This section is primarily concerned with how the girls experienced their participation in the Girl Up Club in terms of how they constructed new identities and experienced empowering moments in the school, household, and Girl Up environments.

Intervention Group

Four of the five respondents explained how the intervention had transformed their behavior and attitudes and beliefs about themselves from initially identifying as being shy to becoming assertive and confident. This had ripple effects into their behavior as they began to speak up among friends, family members, and other participants in the Girl Up Club:

Before I joined Girl Up, I was shy. My friends used to abuse me and even sometimes they beat me. But now I can talk for myself. (Brenda)

I am confident and assertive. I can decide this is bad, this is good. (Margret)

Before I joined Girl Up I was shy I couldn't speak for myself. The coaches taught me how to speak out. During the sessions, the coaches would always bring us before the others and tell us to talk. That was how I started being assertive. The first day I realized I could speak out was when I had a one on one conversation with my mother. She was very happy to know that I am no longer as shy as before. (Priscilla)

Girl Up has helped me to develop on my own. Before joining Girl Up, I used to be shy, but after joining, I felt better and confident. Because before they would ask me a question and I just looked down. I would not say anything. Even when I knew the answer, but I was feeling shy. But now if you asked me a question, I would answer without fearing. (Vivian)

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Participants in the intervention began to identify as confident rather than as shy, which enabled them to share their knowledge and skills with others:

> *I also teach my neighbors and my friends in Sunday School. They were also unable to speak out before, but I am glad that they are able to speak out after I taught them what the coaches taught me. (Priscilla)*

> *If my friends have problems I give them the advice I get from Girl Up. I cram it in my head and come home and tell them…. My friends used to be shy, but now at this time they can talk. They have the power to talk now. (Margret)*

> *I usually preach the Girl Up word. I am the pastor. I start teaching and I make sure that they understand. (Grace)*

Effective communication is an overarching aim of the Girl Up Club and is integrated throughout all the trainings as the coaches encourage girls to speak up during conversations. There is one training that specifically touches on communication skills, which I attended at the intervention school. It included an exercise on gender dynamics in communication, exploring the difference between how boys and girls communicate in class (GUIU, 2018). During the training, Gloria and the patron teachers illustrated to the girls the keys to effective communication: keeping eye contact, voice projection, and body posture. In practicing this exercise in front of the whole group, the girls had a difficult time projecting their voice and maintaining eye contact. Gloria explained to me after the training session:

> *It is difficult for the girls to transition to speak up, but after some time they learn. (Gloria)*

Additionally, all five girls discussed that due to their participation in the intervention program, they improved their school performance:

> *Before entering Girl Up, I used to perform very poor because I joined bad peer groups. After joining Girl Up, they told me the truth, 'Can you stop those peer groups? They can go outside and tell you to come and escort us to the toilet'. But now, if you tell me, 'come and escort me to the toilet' I will ask you that 'did I come here to escort you to the toilet?' Now for me I know what has brought me to school, not to escort other people to the toilet. (Vivian)*

> *Interviewer: Do you think Girl Up helped you perform better in school?*
> *Grace: By the way, yeah. They used to tell me that after lunch or when you are going home, at like 4, you come, and I came. They taught me. You know, they made sure that I understood what I did not know at school.*
> *I: The coaches here can help you with class?*
> *G: Yeah, they helped me.*
> *I: Ok, so your results improved?*

G: They improved.

It has helped me because for me, even up to now I have not yet been a good performer at school. But, I know if I keep taking the advice from Girl Up, I'll be a very good performer. (Margret)

Because Girl Up pays my school fees, I get the courage to work hard and get good results for them to be happy. (Brenda)

The school scholarship intervention and support from the coaches encouraged the girls to perform better in school. This is particularly relevant in considering how the girls make sense of Girl Up in relation to the other spaces and environments they inhabit. Two participants compared the school environment to the Girl Up environment:

When we talk to some teachers when your friends beat you, the teacher just says that you were playing together. But if you went to the coaches, they would call that one and talk to him or her. (Brenda)

Coach Monica is helping more people than even a school can help. (Margret)

Margaret resumed by relating the Girl Up space and coaches to her household environment, which is also reiterated by Priscilla:

In Girl Up, I am more empowered than at home. Because at home you are just there on your own, but here they teach you that you can do everything when you are empowered…The person I go to in most cases is Coach Monica because even my mum, some days she will not say, 'Let me sit and hear my daughter's problems.' But, if I come to Coach Monica she can at least take time and listen to what is hurting me. (Margret)

When I come to Girl Up I just feel free, but at home they don't make me happy. There they just abuse me. (Priscilla)

5.3.5 Discussion

This findings section is rich in information related to how the girls understood, perceived, and experienced the concept of 'empowerment'. The girls' meaning of empowerment will be analyzed in relation to the empowerment theoretical framework (as presented in Chapter 3) and the various levels and dimensions of 'empowerment'. First, it was important to see which girls had ever heard of the word before and if so, their understanding of it and whether they considered themselves to be empowered. Differences among the two groups were noted in the number of girls in the control group (two) and intervention group (four) who had heard of the word 'empowerment' and had an idea of what it meant. In addition, one girl in the control

group considered herself empowered, in comparison to four in the intervention group. The difference was not surprising given that 'empowerment' is a word that is used in the training and communication literature used by GUIU.[18] It must also be noted that there is no Luganda translation for the word empowerment, so the respondents' understanding was further limited by language.

Of the girls who expressed that they understood the word, their meanings of 'empowerment' varied as explored. The table below illustrates the difference in the meanings of empowerment given by the respondents in section 5.3.1. Discussion of the girls' meanings will be explored in more detail below.

Table 5.1: Respondents' meanings of 'empowerment' in relation to the levels and dimensions of girls' empowerment

Name	School	Level	Dimension
Sheila	Control School	Individual	Political
Farid	Control School	Individual, Relational	Psychological
Grace	Intervention School	Individual, Collective	Psychological, Knowledge
Brenda	Intervention School	Relational	Psychological
Margret	Intervention School	Individual, Collective	Psychological, Knowledge
Vivian	Intervention School	Individual, Relational	Psychological, Knowledge, Physical

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[18] For instance, in the Girl Up Club curriculum different versions of 'empower' are used twice to explain how assertive communication can lead someone to 'feeling empowered' (GUIU, 2018, p. 18) and in an exercise for girls to identify their strengths and weaknesses to become 'an empowered leader' (GUIU, 2018, p. 41).

Within the control group, Sheila used the President and mayors as an example of an empowered person, while Farid expressed that "empowerment means when you're confident" and provided her personal story of when she did not give up on her education. These meanings were both at the individual level (as well as the relational level for Farid) with the former fitting with the political empowerment dimension and the latter the psychological empowerment dimension.

On the other hand, the responses from the intervention group illustrated empowerment at all three levels: individual, relational, and collective. 'Empowerment' was an individual experience for three of the girls in the intervention group where power was expressed as 'power from within' as one has a sense of self-acceptance, self-worth, and self-respect (Rowlands, 1997). Grace explained that it means "to empower yourself" and Margret said that "I am confident, that's why I'm saying I'm very empowered". Similarly, Vivian illustrated individual power within her description of an 'empowered girl': a girl who can talk for herself, who has body confidence, who can say 'no' to early sex and marriage and refuse the attention of boys who tell her that she is beautiful. In her explanation, the girl is imagined as a separate entity from the wider collective and in this way has to fight against the patriarchal order by speaking up for herself.

At the same time, Vivian demonstrated how the experience of empowerment has the potential to develop one's ability to negotiate and influence the nature of relationships. She provided the example of girls speaking up for themselves in the parent/child relationship around the question of early marriage. Likewise, she showed how being empowered enabled her to refuse attention from boys who call her beautiful, because she already knows that she is beautiful. Furthermore, Brenda offered examples of empowerment in relation to her friendships. She first contributed a story of a girl whose friend encouraged her to face her parents at home even after she did poorly on a school exam and another of being empowered enough to encourage her friend to join the Girl Up Club. In the control group, Farid expressed how she felt empowered when she refused to listen to the people who told her she would fail in school. Instead, she was empowered and as a result she 'never gave up'. These excerpts from the interviews with the respondents indicate how empowerment is understood at the relationship level as they are able to negotiate and influence the nature of relationships.

Collective empowerment was found when girls described experiences of working together or being in collective spaces to have more of an impact than each could have done alone (Rowlands, 1995). In this study, collective empowerment also includes the role of others and

the group in contributing to an individual's sense of empowerment, or in other words, how power is experienced with a relationship and within a group setting. No respondents from the control group described empowerment in terms of collective empowerment while two respondents, Grace and Margret, from the intervention group described 'empowerment' in relation to the collective and in particular their participation in the Girl Up Club. For instance, Margret expressed how empowerment means "empower means to help girls put in more effort to do what they want to do or to reach their goals". In this particular passage, Margret did not explain exactly who the actor is who empowers girls, yet, it can be inferred from the rest of her interview that GUIU and the coaches in the Girl Up Club were the ones who empower girls. Grace reiterated this as she explained that the intervention, the Girl Up Club, contributed towards her feelings and experiences of being empowered.

In terms of how the respondents made sense of the concept of 'empowerment' in relation to Stromquist's (2015b) five dimensions of empowerment (economic, political, knowledge, psychological, and physical), the majority of the girls' (five out of six) understanding was correlated to psychological empowerment as they gained confidence and self-esteem. Three of six girls also illustrated an understanding of empowerment related to knowledge empowerment. For example, Grace discussed how learning new skills made her feel empowered and Margret learned that "you can do everything when you are empowered". Similarly, Vivian showed acquired knowledge, specifically gender-related knowledge, when she expressed how she can say 'no' to early sex and marriage. This is in line with Stromquist's (2015b) definition of knowledge empowerment as not just general knowledge, but "knowledge that is pertinent to identifying the conditions of subordination that women experience and exploring how such conditions can be contested" (p. 313). Vivian's responses also included aspects of physical empowerment when she expressed that an empowered girl has body confidence.

Likewise, the word most used to describe a positive quality in their role models was 'confident'. The girls explained that they admired that their role models were 'confident' and as Rebecca in the control group eloquently explained about her mom: "she knows who she is". In this way, the girls similarly focused their admiration on the notion of 'confidence' as linked to individual psychological empowerment. Another positive quality that was described by three of the girls was related to how their role models were helpful, generous, and worked "hard to save people's lives" as Brenda stated. They provided stories of when their role models helped them with their

challenges, such as when Vivian's teacher helped her during her menstrual period. This quality can be viewed as being related to the collective level of empowerment where the role models positively empower others around them. Other words that were used to describe the positive qualities of their role models included: 'pretty', 'peaceful', 'brave', 'talented', 'helpful', and 'smiling'.

This line of exploration around the question of role models was valuable as another method to understand how girls made meaning of the word 'empowerment' without explicitly using the word. It also provided insight into how role models can influence girls' understanding of gender inequalities and particular limitations faced by girls in the community. As Marcus (2015) explained about the adolescent girls' club model "most clubs aim to empower girls through mentoring, inspiring them by introducing them to role models – local women or older adolescent girls who have achieved beyond what was expected of them and who are usually strong advocates of gender equality" (p. 5), which is echoed by Warner et al.'s (2014) findings. The mentorship aspect of the Girl Up Club exposed the girls in the intervention group to older role models from their same poverty-ridden communities and in this way, the mere act of them existing proved what was possible to achieve.

Another significant finding from this study is that the majority of the girls in the control group, four out of five, described feelings of 'pride in being a girl' even if they did not use the word 'empowerment' and did not take part in the intervention. This finding reveals a serious concern of using the term 'empowerment' under the assumption that it is process of change from being in a state of disempowerment to empowerment, or in other words that one first has to be disempowered to become empowered (Kabeer, 1999). If we understand being proud of oneself as a similar notion to individual psychological empowerment then the results would show that the intervention and non-formal does not lead to this level of empowerment of adolescent girls, since they are already empowered. However, if we follow the argument for a 'wider picture of empowerment' (Rowlands, 1999) that "empowerment is not simply about self-esteem or other individual characteristics, it is about developing capabilities that enable engagement in social change processes" (Monkman, 2011, p. 2) then feeling a sense of pride is not necessarily linked to the notion of empowerment as contributing to social change processes in the relational and collective levels.

The last section in the findings, 5.3.4, focused attention on how the girls in the intervention group experienced participation in the Girl Up Club. One of the main findings was how the

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girls made sense of their individual transition from being 'shy' to becoming 'confident'. This change can be linked to the focus of the Girl Up Club on effective communication as a skill that has the ability to increase girls' feelings and perceptions of empowerment. As the girls increased feelings of confidence, it led to behavior change as they explained how they were now able to speak up for themselves and speak out against cases of violence (as discussed in 5.2.1).

Furthermore, the girls explained how they have shared their learnings with others, which has empowered them at the relational level, so that as Margret said, "they have the power to talk now". In this way, they have developed into leaders, peer educators, and role models within their communities. This supports the findings from Norton and Mutonyi's study (2007) that participation in school HIV/AIDS clubs provided female students with the opportunity to gain leadership skills. The girls participation in the Girl Up Club illustrates the ripple effect and ongoing impact of such programming when girls become leaders and role models for other adolescent girls.

Additionally, the findings showed a positive correlation between the girls' participation in the intervention and their school performance, in other words one can argue that there is a link between empowerment and education. It is actually quite intuitive - the more supported, empowered, and encouraged a girl feels, the more likely she is to work hard in school and improve her school performance. While other researchers have examined whether or not education leads to feelings of empowerment (Holmarsdottir et al., 2011; Jones, 2011; Stromquist, 2015b), it is critical to also examine how empowerment can lead to improvement in schooling outcomes for girls.

6 Conclusion

The overarching aim of this research was to understand how adolescent girls in Kampala, Uganda make meaning of being in school, how they perceive the concept of 'empowerment', and how the girls in the intervention group experienced participation in the Girl Up Club. It is the hope that this research contributes to the growing interest in girls' education and empowerment in developing countries by contextualizing adolescent girls' lived realities. The findings revealed the nuances involved in girls' access and retention in primary schooling and conceptions of 'empowerment' in two primary schools in Kampala. Even though the government in Uganda is a signatory to global gender goals around education and has created its own national policies to the same effect, including the provision of universal primary education, in reality the situation for adolescent girls is dire. Universal primary education is far from the reality as school fees combined with the purchase of school materials, books, and uniforms becomes a substantial expenditure for the poor, especially for girls who conduct the bulk of domestic chores (Holmardottir et al., 2011; Stromquist, 2001; Stromquist 2015b). Despite the absence of questions about school fees and poverty in the interview guide, this issue was revealed by all the participants who struggled to stay in school and not be 'chased' away for lack of school fees. Thus, the significant connection between poverty and girls' education cannot be ignored.

At the same time, the notion of school as a safe space for adolescent girls was dismissed by the research participants in the intervention group, in line with previous findings (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2013; Dunne et al., 2006; Jones, 2011; Manzini-Henwood et al., 2015; Mirembe & Davies, 2001; MoES, 2013; Muhanguzi, 2011). The girls provided vivid accounts of sexual exploitation, harassment, and rape by male teachers experienced by themselves or girls they knew. Given their knowledge empowerment from the Girl Up Club, these girls were able to speak out against the violence either to the perpetrator himself or report the incident. Their actions against gender-based violence can be viewed as an act of political empowerment that challenged gendered norms and assumptions that violence against women and girls is acceptable. Thus, the club functions as a protection/child safeguarding mechanism (Marcus, 2015). Similarly, the girls in the intervention group illustrated an understanding of the gendered unequal division of labor, which was not shared with the control group. This gendered knowledge is crucial to girls' empowerment as knowledge that leads to the development of a gender consciousness and challenging gender oppression (Stromquist, 2015b).

The notion of spatial empowerment is an area recommended for further research given that the respondents described their sense of (dis)empowerment within the broader socio-economic and gendered environments that influenced challenges and opportunities (Baric et al., 2009; Jones, 2011; Warner et al., 2014). As Jones (2011) explains: "young women require supportive family, community and institutional structures, and policy and programming that have effective, transformative objectives, interventions and approaches that enable their empowerment" (p. 410). Adolescent girls' clubs can achieve a great deal, but they will not, on their own be enough to transform deeply-rooted gender norms (Marcus, 2015). While the Girl Up office and adolescent girls' programming offered girls in the intervention group an alternative space that represented safety and support, it existed within an otherwise predominantly gender unequal school, home, and community environment, which requires a systematic societal gender transformation.

Given the research design and limitations of sample size, the study cannot make robust generalizations, rather it sheds light into specific experiences and meaning-making among adolescent girls at a certain moment in time. I am cognizant that despite the positive findings of the impact of the Girl Up Club, "there is no 'one size fits all' program model that can be replicated in multiple settings" (Warner et al., 2014, p. 27). Yet, a few points are important in understanding the respondents' meaning-making of the concept of 'empowerment'. The language used by the majority of the respondents revealed how they came to understand 'empowerment' and what it means to be 'empowered'- to be confident and feel pride in being a girl and in who they are. Their understandings predominately fell within Rowland's (1995) individual level of empowerment and Stromquist's (2015b) psychological dimension of empowerment so that "empowerment is about developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity" (Rowlands, 1995, p. 103).

In addition to this shared understanding, the girls in the intervention group expressed additional feelings of empowerment that fit within the other levels and dimensions of empowerment. They described how they constructed new gendered identities after completing the program - transitioning from being shy and quiet to becoming confident and out-spoken. They became empowered to challenge gender inequalities in home and school environments and within their close relationships. They used the skills they learned to earn small incomes to support their schooling in the context of generational poverty. And their inclusion in the Girl Up Club provided them with the collective strength to experience power within the bounds of support

and relations with other girls and older mentors and role models. In other words, the most notable difference between the two groups was in relationship to the dimensions of empowerment, specifically their added experiences of gendered knowledge empowerment, economic empowerment, and political empowerment.

It was my hope to contribute to a richer knowledge base relating to the notion of 'empowerment' and its interaction with formal and non-formal education. The research proved that the formal school space cannot be relied upon as a site of gender knowledge and transformation as it in many cases reinforces gender stereotypes and norms. It is problematic to narrowly focus on girls' access to schooling without considering other aspects of a girls' well-being and gendered experience (Holmarsdottir et al., 2011, Stromquist, 2015b). This conclusion fits within the findings of Holmarsdottir et al. (2011) that "empowerment is not necessarily an automatic outcome of education" (p. 24). Thus, focusing simply on access to formal education will not necessarily lead to empowerment for girls.

In the exploration of the interaction between education and empowerment, it was also integral to examine how, if at all, individual empowerment could contribute to improved educational outcomes for adolescent girls. Through this study, I found that there was a positive correlation between participation in the adolescent girls club and girls' school performance, most notably due to the scholarship support provided by GUIU, skills development for economic empowerment, and the use of role models in its programming. In this way, "empowerment projects position the NGO as a key actor in mediating the process by which individuals and collectives gain access to knowledge and resources" (Monkman, 2011, p. 9).

Therefore, this research supports previous findings (Bandiera, et al., 2012; Baric et al., 2009; Marcus, 2015; Warner et al., 2014) of the effectiveness of non-formal education in the form of adolescent girls' clubs. Transformative non-formal education programs are usually run by NGOs and primarily women-led NGOs (Stromquist, 2015b), yet despite the impacts and potential of their programs, these NGOs, including GUIU, continue to be "woefully under-resourced" (Marcus, 2015). Even when national and local NGOs are provided with financial support, the bulk is given to small-scale, short-term projects, which do not permit for institutional growth and which do not recognize that gender transformation is a long-term project (Marcus, 2015; Stromquist, 2015b). In a time when the rhetoric of girls' education and empowerment easily slips from the lips of policy makers and international development agencies, it is time for these words to be translated into action so that local organizations have

the resources needed to reach vulnerable adolescent girls who eagerly want to participate in adolescent girls' clubs.

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8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Background information

1) What is your full name?
2) How old are you?
3) What year are you in school?
4) What was/is your primary school?
5) Do your parents work? If so, what are their jobs?
6) Has your mother gone to school? When did she stop?
7) Has your father gone to school? When did he stop?
8) Who do you live with at home?
9) Are you from Kampala? Have you lived here your whole life?
10) When did you join the Girl Up Club? Do you still consider yourself a Girl Up girl?

Questions regarding being an adolescent girl in school

- Can you tell me a story of what happens in your day, that is, what you do from the time you wake up to the time you go back to sleep in the evening?
- What is it like to be a girl in primary school?
  - How do you think girls in primary school are different from others (whether out of school or in secondary school)?
- What is your biggest challenge as a girl in school?
- When you put on your school uniform, do you feel different than with normal clothes?
- Imagine if your parents did not have money to send you to primary school, what do you think you would be doing, if not going to school?
  - Do you have any friends that do not go to school? How do you think you are different from them because you go to school?
  - How do you think education has been important in your life?
- Why do you think some children drop out of school?
- Imagine that you were a boy. Do you think your school experiences would be different if you were a boy? How so or why not?

- How would your teachers treat you? How would your friends treat you? What kinds of activities would you participate in? How much time would you have for school work?

Questions regarding 'empowerment'

- Have you heard of the word 'empowerment'? If so, what do you think of when I say the word 'empowerment'?
  - What do you think it means to be an 'empowered girl'?
  - Do you think that you are empowered?
- Can you share an experience that made you feel that you were empowered? Whether through a decision that you made or advice that you offered?
- Where do you most often feel powerful? At home? At school? In the Girl Up Clubs? Please describe.

Questions regarding role models/ futures

- Do you have a role model- someone you look up to? Who is that? What qualities does s/he have that you admire?
- Who/what inspires you?
- Who do you go to when you have a difficult situation? How does s/he support you?
- What kind of life do you want when you are older?
- How far do you want to go with your education? What do you want to become after studying?
- Do you think that you can decide what you want to study and what you want to become after studying?
- How has school prepared you for the future? How has Girl Up prepared you for the future?

Questions regarding participation in Girl Up Clubs

- Please tell me about the Girl Up Club. What was/is it like to be a Girl Up girl?
  - What did you learn in the Girl Up Club?
- Why did you join the Girl Up Club?

- - Would you encourage anyone who has not been part of the Girl Up Club to join the club? What would be the reason you would give them for joining?
- Do you think what you learned with Girl Up was beneficial to you? If so, how was it beneficial?
  - Think back to a time that you used what you learned from the Girl Up Club. What happened? How would you have responded to the situation if you hadn't been in the Girl Up Club?
- Do you feel different as a girl after being in the club? If so, how do you feel you have changed? What have you learnt about being a girl?
- What did you like most about the Girl Up Club and what did you like least about the club?
  - What was your most favorite/least favorite thing to do as a Girl Up girl?
- When you wear your Girl Up t-shirt, how do you feel?
- What do you think of the Girl Up coaches?
  - How do you talk to them? How is it the same or different than talking with your teachers?
- Do you think that being in Girl Up helped you or did not help you to perform better in school? Please explain.
  - Do you feel more comfortable speaking up in class then you did before joining Girl Up?
- What was/is exciting about being a Girl Up girl?

* Items in red denote questions reserved for participants in the intervention group.

8.2 Appendix 2: Consent Form

Request for participation in research project

Education as a Tool for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls in Peri-Urban Slums of Kampala, Uganda

Background and Purpose

This study is part of Masters program in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oslo, Norway. The purpose of the study is to explore the educational and gendered experiences of girls in primary school and to examine if participants of the Girl Up Clubs have benefited from the program, and if so, to what extent. Your daughter was selected to be part of the study since she is a student at St. James Bbiina Primary School and a Girl Up girl, or a student at Nsambya Police School; is in grades Primary 5 to Primary 7; and is between the ages of 9 to 14 years old.

What does participation in the project imply?

Participation means that your daughter will participate in an interview with me and she may also be an active participate during my observations. Questions will concern her experience of being an adolescent girl in primary school, and as a participant in the Girl Up Clubs (if relevant). I will also ask her questions about what 'empowerment' means to her. The data will be collected through notes and audio recordings. As a parent, you can request to see the interview guide beforehand.

What will happen to the information about you?

All personal data will be treated confidentially. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to personal data. Personal data and recordings will be stored in my password protected personal computer and mobile phone. The list of names will also be stored separately from other data.

Participants will indirectly be recognized, their name will not be included but their background information may be identifiable.

The project is scheduled for completion by December 2018. Upon completion of the project, all personal data and recordings shall be deleted.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw your daughter from participation, all personal data will be deleted.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact: Kimberly Wolf, kwolf369@gmail.com, +256 777 454 879 or Birgit Brock-Utne, birgit.brock-utne@iped.uio.no.

The study has been registered with the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Consent for participation in the study

Name: _____

Name of daughter: _____

I have received information about the project and am willing for my daughter to participate:

(Signature and date)