

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

# Buying your Way into Heaven

Education and Corruption in  
International Perspective

Stephen P. Heyneman (Ed.)



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BUYING YOUR WAY INTO HEAVEN

# GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

## Volume 15

Higher education worldwide is in a period of transition, affected by globalization, the advent of mass access, changing relationships between the university and the state, and the new technologies, among others. *Global Perspectives on Higher Education* provides cogent analysis and comparative perspectives on these and other central issues affecting postsecondary education worldwide.

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Education and Corruption in  
International Perspective

*Edited by*

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STEPHEN P. HEYNEMAN

## EDUCATION CORRUPTION IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: AN INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Su Shun was effective and ruthless. He concentrated on a single, highly visible case of corruption involving the Imperial Civil Service examination. The exam was given annually and touched the lives of thousands throughout the country. In his report to Emperor Hsien Feng, Su Shen charged five high-ranking judges with accepting bribes. Also in his report he presented 91 cases in which test scores had been mishandled, and challenged the past year's first-place winner. To restore the reputation of the civil service, the Emperor ordered the beheading of all five judges and the first-place winner. People cheered the action, and Su Shun became a household name

Su Chen was a descendent of the founder of the Ch'ing Dynasty.  
(Min, 2004, p. 150)

### WHAT IS EDUCATION CORRUPTION AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Education is commonly thought to be a haven for the young. No matter how unstable the polity, no matter how dismal the prospects for the economy, education investments are treated as sacrosanct. This is one reason for the popularity of the initiative created by the World Bank, UNESCO, UNPP and UNICEF in 1990 to focus attention on school attendance in low-income countries called 'Basic Education-For-All'. Who could object to putting children in school? However, recently it has been discovered that education systems can be as corrupt as other parts of government and the economy; and that universalistic values of fairness and impartiality, once thought to be universal characteristics of education systems, can be supplanted by the interests of specific individuals, families and ethnic groups.

Corruption in public affairs includes the abuse of authority for material gain. But because education is an important public good, professional standards include more than just material goods; hence the definition of education corruption includes the abuse of authority for both personal as well as material gain. An

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Heyneman (2007).



education system can be corrupt in four ways: (i) through its education functions, (ii) through the supply of goods and services, (iii) through professional misconduct, and (iv) in the treatment of taxation and property.

### *Educational Functions*

These can include the assessment of student achievement. This includes how grades are assigned, how students are selected to elite training programs and how universities acquire accreditation from government agencies. Students may pay a bribe for a particular grade assigned by a department chair, over and above the authority of the classroom teacher. After passing all of her PhD examinations and submitting her thesis, one student in Central Asia had a delay of several years because the chair of her dissertation committee kept raising his bribe before he would sign the final papers (Heyneman, 2008). Admissions to universities may include private bribes to the admission committees or to department chairs. Students may pay bribes to have access to university-owned housing, access to their personal transcripts or a book in the library for which there are only a few copies. A professor may demand that a student show him the sales receipt so that he knows the student had purchased his personally-written textbook instead of obtaining the book in the library. Between 80–84% of the university students in Bulgaria, Moldova and Serbia are aware of illegal bribes to gain admission; between 28–36% think that admission test scores can be changed. On average, between 18% and 20% of the students in Bulgaria, Croatia and Serbia, and 40% of the students in Moldova report that they had used some illegal method to gain university admission (Heyneman, Anderson, and Nuraliyeva, 2008, forthcoming). New degree programs and a plethora of private (usually proprietary) higher education institutions in South and East Asia, Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and in Sub-Saharan Africa all have to be ‘recognized’ by (usually government) accreditation committees. These committees remain in the hands of rectors of the traditional institutions who have an interest in limiting competition. The system of licensing (certifying professionals) is responsible for many sources of corruption. University programs are endowed with this authority hence the functions of accreditation and licensing are combined. Whenever higher education institutions are associated with licensure the stakes for accreditation are high, and the private bribe price for accreditation will be high.

### *Supply of Goods and Services*

The education system in any country is a massive enterprise. Students need to be supplied with furniture, reading and writing materials, pedagogical equipment of many times. The buildings in which they work must be constructed and maintained. In 2000, the education in North America constituted an industry of 86 billion dollars (Heyneman, 2001). In spite of the common political and economic

reasons presented,<sup>2</sup> governments have long been known to monopolize the supply of education goods and services for reasons of private pecuniary gain. New socialist nations of East Africa in the 1960s nationalized schools supplies in order to levy a hidden tax for attending public schools. School fees were required for attendance. Those fees were to finance school supplies. But the value of the supplies was systematically less than the value of the original fees. The missing monies were used for private purposes of government ministers (Heyneman, 1975). Thought necessary for reasons of national pride, writing 'local' textbooks is used by ministers of education as a means to exploit a monopoly over the nations' largest reading population and to enrich themselves (Heyneman, 2006).

### *Professional Misconduct*

There are many forms of professional misconduct in education (Braxton, and Bayer, 1999). Among the most common:

- Accepting material gifts or rewards in exchange for positive grades, assessments or selection to specialized programs.
- Biasing a grade or an assessment because of family or other private requests
- Assigning of grades or assessments biased by a student's race, culture, social class, ethnicity, or other ascriptive attributes
- Forcing pupils to take 'private fee paying lessons' to pass teacher based assessments of student progress
- Disclosing confidential information about a student
- Sexually or otherwise exploiting, harassing or discriminating against particular students
- Adopting an inadequate textbook or educational product because of a manufacturer's gifts or incentives
- Forcing students to purchase materials where profits accrue to the instructor
- Ignoring the misconduct of colleagues
- Utilizing school public property for private gain

There have yet to be systematic surveys of misconduct, but there is anecdotal evidence of sexual harassment of students in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. And there are reports that teachers in Latin America force students to pay fees for private lessons before they will be passed on to the next grade.

### *Property and Taxes*

Educational facilities often occupy prime locations in urban areas. These can be rented or leased for both educational and other purposes. Many institutions must supplement public with non-public income. But how should educational property and educational income be treated: as private or public? Should it be taxed? Should

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<sup>2</sup> These include the need to protect local employment, the necessity of having a grace period for 'infant industries', the inadequate market for private suppliers and the saving of foreign exchange.

they be taxed as the same rate as profit-making institutions? As profit-making institutions which have no public good purposes? This area is in flux. International precedents are unknown and legal principles unexplored. Because of the confusion in terms and the lack of experience, the arena of education property and educational taxes has become a source of illegal activity. Whenever there is significant ambiguity over legal principles and precedent, bribery is common.

#### WHY IS EDUCATION CORRUPTION IMPORTANT?

Since the time of Plato, it has generally been understood that a key ingredient in the making of a successful nation/state is how it chooses its technical, commercial, military and political leaders. In general it is agreed that no modern nation can be credible if leaders are chosen on the basis of ascriptive characteristics, i.e., the characteristics with which they were born – race, gender and social status. On the other hand, it is common for families to try to protect and otherwise advantage their own children and relatives. Every parent wishes success for his own child; every group wishes to see success of children from their particular group. This is normal.

Schooling provides the mechanism through which these opposing, yet legitimate, influences can be managed fairly. It is the common instrument used by nations to ‘refresh’ the sources of its leadership. Economists have attempted to understand the sacrifice in economic growth if there is a serious bias in the selection of its leaders (Klitgaard, 1986). It has been estimated, for instance, that developing countries could improve their GNP/capita by five percent if they were to base their leadership upon merit as opposed to gender or social status (Pinera & Selowsky, 1981). In fact, by some estimates, the economic benefit to developing countries of choosing leaders on the basis of merit would be three times more than the benefit accruing from a reduction in trade restrictions for imports to OECD countries (Kirmani et al., 1984).

Success in schooling is one of the few background characteristics seen as necessary for modern leadership. Although it is possible for leaders to emerge through experience, good fortune and military power, getting ahead in school is essential for leadership in a modern democracy.

But what if schooling itself is not fair? What if the public comes to believe that the provision of schooling favors one social group? What if the public does not trust in the judgment of teachers on student performance? What would happen if the process of schooling had been corrupted?

In a democracy, the public takes a keen interest in the fairness of its education system. If the public does not trust the education system to be fair or effective, more may be sacrificed than economic growth. It might be said that current leaders, whether in commerce, the military, science or politics, had acquired their positions through privilege rather than achievement. If the school system cannot be trusted, it may detract from a nation’s sense of social cohesion, the principal ingredient of all successful modern societies (Heyneman, 2004).

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF A CORRUPT EDUCATION SYSTEM?

One universal function of education is to certify the acquisition of knowledge and skills and to identify those who may deserve more specialized training. The assumption is that this process is unbiased by ascriptive characteristics, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender. It is common that ascriptive characteristics do in fact play a role in both of these functions, and this helps explain why it is usually illegal and frequently a subject of political attention, court action, fines, penalties and occasionally prison. Corruption is similar in that it is illegal, but rarely is it the subject of the same political attention as other illegal actions. Often it is ignored. In many instances it is denied. It is embarrassing. Excuses are common. Corruption is attributed to low salaries of educators, or an environment in which traditions have broken down and where the economy has declined. Economic hardship is commonly given as a rationale. In instances where corruption is a function of family influences (e.g., your mother insists you give your niece a good grade), tradition is given as a rationale. After all this is a part of their culture, what can you expect?

Whatever the rationale, the effects are profound. When education loses impartiality, it loses quality. When education loses quality individual and community economic returns to education investments are reduced. Those who use educational products (employers) have to allocate their own resources to make up for the reduction in educational quality. Where corruption is high, the economic rates of return to education investments may be reduced by as much as 70% and lifetime earnings of individuals might be reduced by as much as 50% (Heyneman, Anderson & Nuraliyeva, 2008). Where corruption in higher education approaches 50% (where over 50% of the students report having had experience with illegal payments), employers cannot trust what graduates will know and be able to do. Employers in Central Asia for instance, attempt to hire new employees from universities known for a lack of corruption (foreign universities). Employees from potentially corrupt universities have to be placed in specialized training programs to test whether they had the skills required. Employers are to administer special tests to differentiate those who bought their degrees from those who achieved them in the expected fashion (Heyneman, Anderson, & Nuraliyeva, 2008). The use of these sorting devices imposes additional costs on firms, and significant costs on the applicants. For instance, applicants from universities with reputations for corruption are not considered for technical or professional jobs and are regularly screened out of jobs in international firms. Corruption imposes costs even on applicants who may not have engaged in corrupt practices. There is a negative connotation of being an applicant engineer from any country where corruption in higher education is common; many will never be considered credible in international firms with access to job applicants from all regions of the world. It is possible to think of particular regions in the world which have already reached the 'tipping point', where corruption in the education system is so pervasive that the future social cohesion is in danger (Silova, Johnson, & Heyneman, 2007).

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT EDUCATION CORRUPTION?

Necessary measures can be grouped into four categories. These include:

1. *Structural reforms* necessary to reduce the opportunity for corruption – the establishment of an autonomous examination and accreditation agency, separating the process of certification from higher education institutions, clear ownership of educational property, tax differentiation between for profit and not-for-profit educational institutions, and the freedom for non-profit educational institutions to seek monetary support without being subject to taxation.
2. *Mechanisms for adjudication and management* – the establishment of professional boards, university boards of trust, school boards, public ombudsmen, and faculty/student code of conduct boards to hear cases of infractions and to recommend consequences.
3. *Preventive Mechanisms* – ‘Blue Ribbon’ committees, annual reports to the public on education corruption, public access to financial statement of educational institutions, codes of conduct for administrators, faculty and students, public advertisements for all codes of conduct, anti-corruption commissions and a free and active education press
4. *Sanctions* – criminal penalties for economic and professional misconduct, public exposure, dismissal from employment, fines payable to the victim for professional misconduct, and withdrawal of license to practice.

Some might argue that education corruption is ‘cultural’; that certain cultures do not consider it to be a serious problem. In my experience, this is not true. All cultures are shamed by unfairness, and no society is absent of rules of fairness within the education system. As a norm in education, fairness is universal. What does differ is how to treat the evidence. In some instances, shame may prevent one from admitting the obvious. When this occurs, corruption will remain unaddressed and will spread like a cancer until trust is absent and the value of educational investments is reduced to virtually zero.

One other implication might be mentioned. Development assistance agencies – the World Bank, the regional development banks and most bi-lateral aid organizations – make investments in higher education justified by the expectation of economic and social benefits. These agencies may have to re-think their strategies when it is understood that the impact of their investments are reduced when made in higher education systems with high levels of perceived corruption (Heyneman, Anderson, & Nuraliyeva, 2008).

Education institutions and education systems are not free of corruption just because there are no data on corruption. The absence of fact does not lessen corruption’s effect. To combat corruption, each minister of education and the rector of each university must now demonstrate that corruption is under control. Those that do not give evidence that corruption is under control will be assumed to be of low quality.

## EXAMPLES AND DISCUSSION

This book contains illustrations of education corruption from different parts of the world. The article by Saliju Bakari and Fiona Leach, "I invited her to my office: Normalising sexual violence in a Nigerian college of education" and by John Collins, "When schools fail to protect girls: School related gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa" are drawn from Africa. Both report that the characteristics of corruption are largely a function of sexual misconduct. These are illustrations of a teacher's abuse of professional authority. Collins, however, reports that on occasion the initiator of the misconduct can be a student using sexual favours to gain academic favour.

Two articles are drawn from Asia. In the case of Walter Dawson, "The tricks of the teacher: Shadow education and corruption in Cambodia," teachers are found to be entrepreneurs who use their authority over students to augment their income. However Dawson finds that their actions are consistent with government behaviour more broadly. This characterization is substantiated by Dennis McComac in his article on "Corruption in Vietnamese higher education," where he describes the use of bribes in higher education as 'the norm' rather than the exception.

Two articles are drawn from the post socialist part of the world. One is from the former Soviet Union, by myself titled: "Moral standards and the professor: A study of faculty at universities in Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan." Except in universities with international accreditation, bribery is found to be common. Nevertheless teachers may also alter the grade of a student because of family or personal relations, not only because of monetary gain. In this region corruption extends to higher education administration through bribes to ministry officials for accreditation, to deans and department chairs who over-rule the teacher's grades in exchange for a bribe and to faculty who may withhold their signature on a dissertation until a bribe is paid. In spite of these examples it is also found that there are a small but important group of 'resisters', faculty who do not engage in corrupt practices regardless of how common these practices are among their colleagues. These 'silent heroes' may represent a strength in the common ideal of the higher education professoriate.

In an article written by Bojan Maricik, "Models of corruption experienced by the students during the studies and anti-corruption measures conducted by the students in Macedonia," represents the experience of students who have experienced education corruption and describes the things which they have done to reduce it.

And there are two articles from the European Union. In his article "The European higher education area as an instrument of transparency," Sjur Bergman discusses the Bologna Process and other mechanisms which influence the countries of eastern and central Europe. He suggests that the Council of Europe and other regional institutions may be used as a means of encouraging greater transparency in education. The article by Pasi Sahlberg, "The role of international organizations in building trust and combating corruption," carefully lays out what each European institution is doing to combat education corruption and assist those countries suffering from it. The European Training Foundation in some ways has led the way

in this effort and will likely be a strong factor in helping solve the problem in the Europe and Central Asia region.

This book represents the most recent illustrations of what may become a global issue. More research and monitoring are needed, as are additional illustrations from other parts of the world. Though education corruption may be a world-wide phenomenon, it emerges differently in different regions. It is hoped that this book will help launch a broad effort to better understand and reduce it.

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SALIHU BAKARI & FIONA LEACH

**'I INVITED HER TO MY OFFICE': NORMALISING  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN A NIGERIAN  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION\***

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores sexual violence in a college of education in Northern Nigeria, drawing on empirical data collected in 2002–2003. It investigates the nature and scale of this violence and reveals how it was sustained through a sexually explicit male discourse which presented female sexuality as flawed and debased. The absence of any national legislation regarding sexual harassment in institutions in Nigeria, combined with weak enforcement of existing policies and procedures intended to ensure equal opportunity and professional standards in the college, allowed male lecturers, management and students to engage with impunity in acts of sexual violence towards female students.

Nationally, Nigeria has a wide gender gap in literacy, school enrolments, share of national income, and participation in the labour market and in public office (UNDP, 2006). In 2004 there were only 55 female students to every 100 male students at the tertiary level (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2006). Not surprisingly, educational environments tend to be male-oriented and male-controlled and provide the contexts in which various forms of discrimination against women flourish. Colleges of education are no exception. Acceptance of institutionalised forms of sexual violence among trainee teachers helps to explain the prevalence of such violence in schools, where it is perpetrated by teachers and students, tolerated by the authorities, and normalised by victims as well as perpetrators (Dunne, Humphreys, & Leach, 2006; Leach & Humphreys, 2007).

The chapter starts with a brief overview of the research setting and research design; it then documents the nature and scale of sexual violence in the college, drawing on personal accounts from interviews with staff and students, and from student essays. Central to this violence was the sexual exploitation of female students, facilitated by their subordinate position in the college in terms of both gender and authority (and, to a lesser extent, age). The chapter goes on to reveal how the male construction of violence generated a range of discursive strategies, which were used to facilitate, justify and normalise sexually violent acts against female students.

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\* Chapter first appears as in Dunne, M. (ed.) (2008) *Gender, sexuality, and development: Education and society in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Netherlands: Sense Publishers.



Although sexual violence against female staff was widespread,<sup>1</sup> it is not covered in this chapter. Violence between male students and between female students may also have existed but no respondent brought this up either in interviews or essays and it was not explored by the researcher. Relations among staff and students were presented exclusively in heterosexual terms. Following Kelly (1988), who argued that sexual violence should ‘cover all forms of abuse, coercion and force that women experience from men’ (p. 59 cited in Hearn, 1996, p. 33) we have used the term broadly to include the (often overlapping) categories of physical, verbal and psychological violence uncovered by the research. Behaviour commonly labelled as ‘sexual harassment’ or ‘sexual abuse’ is subsumed under this broader term.

### *The Research Context*

The college is one of 20 federal colleges of education in Nigeria providing training for primary and secondary teachers leading to a Certificate of Education. Although located in the Northern region, its staff and student body at the time of the research reflected the full range of geopolitical and ethno-religious groups across the country’s 36 states. In terms of gender balance, 25 percent of academic staff and 31 percent of students were female while almost all the senior management were male. The male researcher was a member of the academic staff at the time. Being both a man engaging in feminist research in a male-dominated institutional environment and an insider to the research setting presented a range of challenges. However, it also offered unique insights into the ways in which men were able to pursue their activities unchallenged – insights which might well not have been accessible to a female researcher.

The findings reported here are drawn primarily from interviews with 23 female and 22 male students, four mixed-gender focus group discussions with students and a selection of the 1,000 student essays collected by the researcher on perceptions and experiences of gender inequity in the college. Interviews with 33 members of academic staff (15 female) also provided data. Sexual violence was a major thread running through the data.

## SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND VICTIMISATION

Feminist research has situated men’s violence at the heart of patriarchy, which seeks to sustain and perpetuate itself through the subordination of women (Hearn, 1998; Beasley, 1999; Connell, 2003). Violence is also a resource for the construction and reproduction of hegemonic gender relations, especially certain versions of (hyper)masculinity. In this particular college setting, male staff and students continually sought to re-affirm male hegemony through the sexual exploitation of female students.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bakari and Leach (2007) for a detailed account.

All the staff and students interviewed, with the exception of one male student, confirmed that female students were subjected to widespread sexual violence in the college. Some female students recounted personal experiences of being sexually harassed, intimidated and threatened, and many of their essays stated that it was the principal problem affecting their studies. Much of the violence was perpetrated by male lecturers. Female students in interviews estimated that 45–65 percent of male lecturers forcefully sought sexual favours from students, while one female lecturer estimated that two out of every three female students had been approached by at least one lecturer. It was generally acknowledged that many students had to choose between opting to accept the lecturers' advances and withdrawing from the college.

Some of the most compelling evidence of sexual violence was contained in the female student essays. These came from a wide spectrum of the student body, cutting across religious and ethnic backgrounds and courses of study, and included 13 married female students. The following are a few of their statements:

... when I have got a problem and I [go] to meet any lecturer to help me solve it; the next thing for him is to expect me to offer him my body before solving the problem for me ... even though they are married and have children that are older than me.

The lecturers asked that we went out with them to satisfy them. Refusal to such demands will lead to either lowering of our scores or having a carry over at the end of the day again and again.

If you refuse they will tell you that you will fail his course. Even when you tell them that you are married, they will tell you that it is better that you are married, because you don't risk to have a child outside marriage.

Some staff were reluctant to admit to its prevalence or downplayed its pervasiveness while others were direct about it, as in the following statement by a male lecturer:

Let us be frank to ourselves, the exploitation in this situation is very high, very very high .... It's almost like if you don't do it, then give way [let others carry on]. It is really difficult to say that anyone [male lecturer] has not got at least one [female student].

Some lecturers were also remarkably frank about their own involvement with female students. One, who said he was emotionally attached to 'about four' female students, explained how these relationships had started:

So, you have seen a girl and she appeals to you and you decide now how do I bring her in. You just say to her, 'Hi, could I send you to buy me something?' Obviously she will say, 'Yes'. When she is back, take a smile and appreciate her acceptance and then ask her name, the normal way.

Another male lecturer used a different approach:

I invited her to my office. That is how it started. What we discussed is none of your business [laughed]. The relationship went out smoothly throughout her stay as a student.

Although many male lecturers denied it, instructing female students to come to their office and then forcing them into accepting a sexual relationship was common, as one male student made clear:

It is common to find that when you knock on an office, you have to wait for a while for the lecturer to open the door for you, and when you go in, you will see a female student at times looking squeezed [dishevelled]. It is common to find lecturers kissing and romancing with students.

One male lecturer also admitted it:

Now, as we are talking, if you have time to go round the lecturers' offices, I am sure, I am sure by now if you go into say fifteen lecturers' offices, out of this number at least you will find eight female students sitting in eight offices ...

Inviting female students to their office or sending them on errands were tactics employed by male staff to remind women of the asymmetry in the gender and authority/age relations of the college, and more broadly of Nigerian society, which made it more difficult for female students to refuse their sexual advances. Male staff appeared to consider the opportunity of a sexual relationship with students as a 'privilege' of their job. Some also used their position to secure a student in marriage. However, these so-called 'good intentions' did not prevent them talking in contemptuous terms about women:

So when you want to marry her, you need to put two and two to make her fall into your trap. So, if you want to catch a rat, there are many ways of catching rats. It depends on the trick you use.

The consequences for a student of rejecting a lecturer's advances could be serious: he could choose to fail her in her examinations, refuse to approve her final year project or lower her grades. Some female students reported having personally experienced this. One particularly poignant essay sums up the devastating consequences of such an abuse of power. The author recounts how she resisted the advances of a lecturer for the whole year, but failed in the examination, despite studying hard; he told her that she would never pass his course if she did not agree to have sex with him.

And these things made me not get my result [not graduate] in the college, until that fateful day I agreed to what he had said. He slept with me and impregnated me and I went and aborted the child, which I never planned to do in my life ... This man uselessly [destroyed] my life and this makes me regret of being a girl in my life. Had it been I am a male, this would not have happened to me.

Bribes were reportedly solicited from female students and/or demands for sex were made when applying for a place in the college. One male lecturer reported his experience as member of a committee which investigated a particular individual regarding admissions practices some years previously: nothing was done to discipline the accused as he was in a powerful senior position, whereas those students who testified against him were dismissed.

There is no evidence in the data to suggest that male lecturers were ever penalised for their predatory behaviour towards female students, even if formal complaints were lodged. The college management tended to dismiss reported incidents as rumours or infrequent occurrences, and, in the prevailing weak policy environment, those in positions of authority had a free rein. The lack of support for female students from staff – some heads of department merely advised them to ‘settle their problems’ with lecturers – cut off another avenue for complaint and redress.

It is important to note that the culture of intimidation and victimisation permeating college life did not only affect female students. Although they were by far the most vulnerable, male students could also attract unwanted attention from male lecturers, for example if a student was having (or was suspected of having) an affair with a female student whom the lecturer had his eye on. Competition from young male students constituted a threat both to the lecturers’ authority and their masculinity as it undermined the sexual ‘privileges’ to which they felt entitled. When asked what happened if both a student and a lecturer befriended a female student, a male student laughed and said: ‘Ah! Then you are Rest in Peace, Wallahi [By God] RIP’. Several cases were cited of male students who were threatened with exam failure if they continued to be seen in the company of a certain girl.

#### PHYSICAL ASSAULT

Men in positions of power may not need to use physical violence to maintain control over subordinated groups (Hearn, 1998). This was the case with the male staff in the college, who, as has been shown, had other less direct means at their disposal to intimidate female students. Male students, by contrast, lacked the power of the former, and therefore had to resort to acts – or threats – of physical violence.<sup>2</sup> Many male students were reported to have beaten female students. Some admitted it openly, with one student even describing how he beat his girlfriend to a state of unconsciousness.

A range of excuses were given by male students to justify this behaviour: that the female student was unfaithful or disrespectful, that she had accepted a gift or assistance with academic work and had subsequently turned down the student’s advances, that the student was jealous or drunk, or ‘desperate’. Male students were said to buy drinks and snacks for female students as a way of ‘catching them’ in

<sup>2</sup> Only one case was cited – by several students – of a male member of staff beating a student: a drunken lecturer was reported to have visited the female students’ hostel in the evening to beat up a particular student who spurned his advances.

their 'nets'. A student who failed to anticipate the hidden conditions attached to the offer and made the man look foolish by rejecting him, only had herself to blame if she was beaten. Some students also claimed that women expected to be beaten and were happy about it, citing the example of the female student beaten unconscious by her boyfriend, who apparently refused to let her parents report him to the police.

Underlying the widespread acceptance within the male student body of male violence against women, was the belief, grounded in wider societal perceptions, that women were inferior beings and sexual 'objects' to be possessed by men. This was made clear in many statements, such as the following from a male student:

You know women generally have a very small thinking faculty. As a man there are many strategic ways of manipulating them to fall attracted to you .... Some of them are hooked by just a bottle of coke. They might not know why you offered them, but they find out that they have to pay for it.

Rejection by a woman therefore represented an unacceptable challenge to males, which could not go unpunished, as another male respondent cautioned: 'She can't take herself so high and escape it. You see, it means she is above men. Is that possible?' Beating women was seen as a way of ensuring compliance and proving their 'manhood'.

Perhaps surprisingly, some female students supported the actions of male students by blaming women for being unfaithful. However, nobody expected male students to be punished for infidelity – and they were shocked that it ever happened at all. One male student recounted witnessing a female student slapping her boyfriend in the lecture hall; to accept such behaviour was to be 'not a proper man'.

As with complaints about staff, official complaints about harassment and intimidation by male students were dealt with in a cursory manner. Any complaint by a student against another student would be dealt with by the student affairs office, which would usually consider it as nothing more than 'fighting' and issue a warning to both parties. Only in exceptional cases might a male student be suspended from the college hostel.

The next section examines the way in which this sexual violence was normalised through a male discursive construction of female sexuality as flawed and degraded. It then goes on to reveal how female students responded differently to the structures and processes which were designed to ensure their acquiescence.

#### NORMALISING VIOLENCE THROUGH SEXUALISED DISCOURSE

The use of language in the college was key to institutionalising and sustaining hegemonic gender relations and to contesting claims about the extent and significance of sexual violence and abuse of power. Language has 'the power to name and define' (Cameron, 1998, p.148) and, as Clark (1998) notes, 'naming is a powerful ideological tool. It is an accurate pointer to the ideology of the namer' (p. 184). Through (re)naming and (re)defining, males in the college sought to invalidate claims of sexual violence while simultaneously humiliating and

dehumanising women. This discourse, which constantly objectified women and labelled female sexuality as flawed, had a cumulative negative effect on female individuality, identity and self-worth, as well as on the way in which women were regarded and treated in the college. It had three notable features: presenting sexual violence as comedy; contesting its existence by re-naming it; and blaming women themselves for any unwelcome sexual advances. Each of these will be considered in turn.

### *Sexual Violence as Comedy*

For men to feel superior, women must be rendered inferior (Connell, 2003). According to Harlow (1996), persistent slighting remarks about women's minds, behaviours and bodies form part of a wide range of daily male practices that contribute to the 'structural location and the general diminishing of women' (p.68). Using derogatory language about female sexuality and the female experience allowed men to project themselves as the rightful occupiers of the college while obliging women to internalise and accept their inferior status, tolerate discriminatory practices and be content that they were accommodated within a male institution. In particular, males used metaphor as a form of comedy to entertain the male peer group, thus providing a springboard for further violence (Hearn, 1998). The ferocity of this male discourse was shocking, not just in the offensive nature of the language used but also in the disregard for women's feelings when men discussed female sexuality in their presence. As one example, in a mixed-gender focus group, therefore in front of female students, one male student said:

There are many funny names used which try to show that women are very cheap. Some call them 'Cotonou', by Cotonou we mean already used property, second-hand. Cotonou<sup>3</sup> means the body is new, but the engine is rotten, that's how they are referred.

Other metaphors ascribed to female students by male students were 'PLC' [Public Liability Company], 'snakes', 'chameleons' and 'bitches'. Male staff and students referred to women in general as 'food', 'meat', 'fruits', 'public transport', 'tortoise', 'pot of honey' and 'my handbag'.<sup>4</sup> As with physical violence, this verbal abuse often occurred when a female student rejected a male's sexual advances. As one female student wrote:

... a female in my department refused a student and she has become the focus of blackmail by male students. They give her all sorts of names, speaking all sorts of bad things against her, even to the point of cartooning her and placing it on the notice boards.

<sup>3</sup> Second-hand goods are largely imported through Cotonou, Benin Republic.

<sup>4</sup> See Bakari and Leach (2007) for offensive language used against female staff.

Male lecturers also made jokes about the labels they gave women during their lectures, as one male student noted:

This morning in our class, a lecturer mentioned a word 'available'. So, he now said that this word reminded him of what they used to call ladies who don't have husbands who display themselves plenty in occasions. So the name given to them he said was 'available'. ... So, this word is also added to my vocabulary. We could call the females here 'available'.

Humour as a weapon for the collective humiliation of women, and as a male bonding ritual (Nayak & Kehily, 2001), fed off the male belief that women existed for the enjoyment of men, a notion that featured prominently in the discourse about gender relations in the college. Knowing that such treatment disturbed and upset women appeared to encourage rather than discourage the men. As the asymmetric power relations in the college made it difficult for women to confront this humiliation, the sustained use of sexual metaphors when talking about, or to, women became embedded in the familiar landscape of the institution.

### *Contesting the Meaning of Sexual Violence*

Another strategy for 'normalising' sexual violence in the college was for male staff and students to contest its existence through defining it narrowly and re-labelling it. Hearn's (1996) UK study of men's violence towards known women found that women defined violence widely to cover a range of categories, including the threat of, and the potential for, violence. Men, however, usually restricted it to its physical form – even then, often excluding acts such as pushing, holding or blocking women. Significantly, they rarely associated it with sex or sexuality; that is to say coercive sex was not considered to be violence. This was also the case in the college. The narrow construction of the term allowed the men to dismiss women's experiences of violence as something 'normal' and 'taken for granted', as in 'nothing really happened' (Kelly & Radford, 1996).

By re-labelling their sexual exploitation of female students as a 'favour' and 'privilege', or as 'barter', in other words a mutually agreed transaction, staff were giving legitimacy to acts of sexual aggression. For example, words such as 'favour', 'privilege' or 'reward' were used as substitutes for 'abuse', 'harassment' or 'violence' in male interviews and essays. Paradoxically, the perception that sexual advances by lecturers were in some way advantageous to female students was widespread and may help explain why such behaviour was prevalent in the college. Female students who were 'chosen' by lecturers were seen as privileged, as they would receive academic help or access to college facilities such as hostel accommodation. This generated much bitterness among male students who saw themselves in unfair competition with the lecturers, as one wrote:

Female students' love by male lecturers stop us from enjoying any privilege. We are like dogs that wait for remnants from a lion. We receive little and thank them so much otherwise we will be in trouble.

The male lecturers saw nothing wrong with either party taking advantage of the opportunities available to them, as one explained:

As females, they have something to offer .... From my own observation they have a lot to offer to male lecturers so they have more opportunities than the males [laughed]. As you know man is an animal, especially males we have here today are young lecturers with a lot of potentialities for higher libido and the females are very attractive with their charming dress. They explore these opportunities.

This perception of mutual advantage was captured by the male staff's talk of 'bilateral trade' and 'trade links' with female students. Almost all informants recognised that transactional sex existed in the college and most male students believed that female students used their sexuality to get what they wanted. Some female students did indeed take the view that establishing a relationship with a male staff member protected them from the attention of other lecturers. The extent to which transactional sex had become part of institutional life is illustrated by one female student who lamented the fact that she was not beautiful enough to attract lecturers to 'trade' with her and so feared that she would not pass their courses. Hence, survival involved not just submitting oneself to a male lecturer's demands, but also 'marketing' oneself. This view was given some credibility by a dean who remarked that he was not interested in seeing a particular female student in his office because 'she is not "grabable"'.<sup>5</sup>

Did female students willingly enter into such arrangements or did they have no choice? While acknowledging that the boundaries between consensual and coercive sexual relations are sometimes blurred, and that some female students may welcome and/or actively seek a sexual liaison with a lecturer (Bennett, 2002), the evidence from this research suggests that they had little real choice if they wanted to avoid being penalised, threatened or beaten. It may therefore not be an exaggeration to state that – for some at least – having a sexual relationship with a lecturer was an unwritten requirement for female academic success in the college.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the management's failure to investigate claims of sexual harassment and assault meant that women knew that they had little chance of redress through official channels; 'barter' was therefore a safer option.

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<sup>5</sup> Likewise, female staff claimed that those who refused the sexual advances of members of the college management were victimised in terms of promotion and other privileges (Bakari & Leach, 2007).



*'Blame the Victim'*

A further strategy to justify sexual violence in the college was to blame the women for sexual provocation. Many respondents believed that any female student who dressed 'provocatively' or 'indecently' was inviting attention of a sexual nature. Thus, women became the harassers of men, who were 'innocent' victims. The primary cause of violence against women was therefore the women themselves. This led some men, and even women, to claim that rape and other forms of sexual violence were self-induced. One male lecturer explained that female students harassed them:

through their dress, their make-up. Look, let us be sincere with ourselves. We are human beings; we are not woods [i.e. we have emotions]. A girl, a matured girl will put on half-dress, half-naked in front of you, mmh? [Laughed] It is harassing.<sup>6</sup>

Peer group pressure exacerbated the situation. While male lecturers actively encouraged their colleagues to engage in transactional sexual relationships with students making remarks such as: 'Is this your handbag?' male students perceived that, to be considered 'hard guys' by their peers, they needed to have a number of girlfriends. At the same time, some female students were being encouraged by their colleagues to accept lecturers' advances as a way of minimising the risk of victimisation and to gain academic favours. The prevalence of these arrangements made it more difficult for other female students to refuse lecturers' demands and easier for the latter to punish those who resisted as a deterrent against future resistance by others.

COMPROMISE, RESISTANCE AND COLLUSION

The power to protest about sexual violence in the college was constrained by a patriarchal ideology that denied women any active voice in defining, constructing, and interpreting what constituted violence. Since the college adopted the male perspective as 'standard', various mechanisms operated, covertly and overtly, to ensure the dominance of men in the institution's affairs. Students and staff had to accept to live with violence, just as they were compelled to live under male authority. Female students responded in different ways to this situation, while male students also recognised the risk of victimisation by male staff and sought to minimise it.

Some female students adopted a strategy of self-censorship, blaming themselves for dressing and putting on make-up in ways that attracted males; they consequently made adjustments to their appearance to avoid drawing attention to

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<sup>6</sup> This perceived 'menace' of female dressing has resulted in a federal ministry of education directive that all tertiary institutions must introduce a dress code, and ensure that it is strictly adhered to.

themselves. By cross-examining their own actions and concluding that their problem was self-inflicted, however, they were accepting a hegemonic male discourse that allowed the real cause of their predicament, the unequal gender power relations in their institution and in society, to remain unchallenged.

Others developed strategies to divert the lecturers' sexual advances. Recognising the potential difficulties that open refusal could bring, they avoided rejecting their advances directly and instead employed delaying tactics, for example by postponing their response to a marriage proposal to the end of their studies. One said she would never tell lecturers openly that she was not interested in their advances; rather she would regularly visit them in their offices, find a range of excuses not to spend more time with them and develop the relationship in such a way that it would be difficult for them to be victimised. Another said:

It is true that every day lecturers would want to see female students in the offices. But it is also important to know that at times we dribble them with our tricks. You cannot say to a lecturer 'I don't love you'. That will mean digging your grave, but you can buy time.

Male students also adopted diversionary tactics: they had coined the term 'solo-wards' whereby they ensured that no male lecturer saw them with a girlfriend whom they suspected was the subject of someone else's attention. Sometimes they colluded with their girlfriends to pretend that they were relatives.

Whereas some female students concluded that the most effective way of avoiding problems was to have a male lecturer as a boyfriend, even 'marketing' themselves to achieve this, others decided to openly reject male sexual overtures. Given the power vested in lecturers and the corrupt practices that prevailed in the college, such resistance could be costly, with the risk of traumatic lifelong consequences exemplified by the student who wrote in her essay about becoming pregnant after finally succumbing to a lecturer's sexual demands. Some married women suffered too: if their husbands decided to withdraw them from the college, they would find it difficult to gain admission to another institution. Resistance to male students' advances also risked physical punishment.

These choices were made by female students in the face of very little support from, or intervention by, female staff, who showed that they had broadly embraced the male hegemony of college life by accepting the 'normality' of sexual violence. Some denied that it existed, or blamed the students themselves, for choosing to visit lecturers in their offices and dressing provocatively. Most notably, one female head of department said that sexual harassment was a 'non-issue', which only 'white men' have time to investigate, and that female students should be flattered by lecturers' attention: 'This [sexual harassment] is a simple thing. My belief is that female students should use the opportunity very well and get what they want'. Nevertheless, a few female staff were reported to have taken action to reduce the vulnerability of individual female students to sexual violence. In one example, a female head of department took over a course being taught by a predatory lecturer, although she did not initiate any procedures against him. In another, a female

lecturer with responsibility for allocating supervisors took over the supervision of two female students who had come to her in tears because some lecturers would only approve their final year projects if they agreed to a sexual relationship.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a shocking portrayal of sexual violence against female students in a college of education in Northern Nigeria by male lecturers, management and students. There is no reason to believe that it is an isolated case. Indeed, the study suggests that, in institutional settings where accountability is poor, where policies on gender equity either do not exist or can be manipulated or ignored, and where staff understanding of professional conduct is limited, unequal gender and authority-age relations make it relatively easy for the sexual exploitation of female students to flourish. The patriarchal ideology of the college projected men's actions as the norm and women as 'intruders' who should not complain and who should accept men's definition of, and explanation for, college practices. This included sexual violence as a taken-for-granted aspect of gender relations.

In this patriarchal, and largely unaccountable, institutional setting, male staff and management saw the opportunity for sexual favours as a privilege of their position, and used the power invested in their posts to act with impunity and to threaten those who resisted with academic failure. Male students also took advantage of the culture of impunity to pursue their own forms of sexual aggression, but, denied the authority of the staff, they often had to resort to acts, or threats, of physical violence to get what they wanted. This male behaviour was facilitated by a hegemonic male discourse that portrayed women as weak but sexually desirable, and female sexuality as flawed and degraded. Female students responded to male predatory behaviour in diverse ways: accommodating it through compromise, actively pursuing it as a survival strategy, and sometimes resisting it.

An institutional environment which has familiarised the country's future teachers to sexual violence against women and taught them to accept it as 'normal' helps explain why it is also accommodated and perpetuated at the school level. By the time they secure appointments as teachers, many male trainees have already become experienced abusers of those towards whom they have a duty of care. The considerable power invested in teachers by the Nigerian education system makes it easy for them to continue to behave in this way towards the children with whom they come into contact in schools.

If schools are to be safe and non-violent places for children, the educational system must ensure high levels of accountability and professionalism, and challenge the patriarchal order that breeds sexual violence, through both its formal processes (curriculum, policy, training) and its informal practices. Those in charge of the training and professional development of teachers must play their part.

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