

**Title:** Female characters in the contemporary oral narrative in the Kenya schools' and colleges drama festival

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**Abstract:** Since the twentieth century, there has been a lot of interest by literary scholars in how the female gender is portrayed in literature and in life in general. This development motivates this study which investigates the portrayal of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival. The study is informed by the fact that no gender based research has hitherto been done on the contemporary oral narrative in the schools' drama festival, which unlike the traditional narrative, begins its life as an individually authored, written text before it is realized as a stage performance. The objectives of the study were to identify, examine and evaluate the images of femininity in the oral narrative texts, to establish and interrogate the style employed in reference to female characters and to analyze other gendered references and associations in these oral narratives. The study employs radical feminist theory and focuses on six oral narrative texts written and performed between 2004 and 2009 in six different regions of Kenya. Purposive sampling was used to select both the texts and the respondents. The research was qualitative in nature and the data was analyzed using the thematic approach. The study concludes that female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the schools' and colleges' drama festival are largely portrayed in stereotypically negative light, and they mainly play peripheral roles which point to their discrimination. The study therefore recommends that oral narrative script writers should be taken through gender workshops to help them write more gender sensitive texts.