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From Absent Obstacles to Allies: Creating space for men in theories of women's empowerment

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Abstract

This paper addresses a major gap in the current women's empowerment literature: the role of men. Throughout the literature, men are constructed as, at best, irrelevant to the empowerment process and, at worst, as the primary obstacles to empowerment. This poses a major problem for empowerment theories because it reproduces the tendency for mainstream 'empowerment' in a development context to connote development of the individual along neoliberal lines and to neglect a wider critique of relational gender power. The desire of feminist development theorists to return to a focus on women after the perceived failure of a gender focus to translate into concrete gains in terms of relational power equality is a valid one, but is ultimately misguided. I argue that empowerment approaches cannot neglect a robust role for both genders in the empowerment process without risking gains made by women. By marginalizing men in the process, empowerment approaches reproduce inequalities that they seek to redress. This paper explores the role of men in empowerment literature and theorizes a way forward for empowerment approaches that include both women and men. It will first analyze the role of masculinities in empowerment in feminist empowerment theory and then, based on a critique of the current literature, move to theorize the possibilities for involving men in the empowerment process. The findings of this research provide insights for a reconceptualization of theoretical and policy-related aspects of women's empowerment that creates space for both genders.

I. Introduction

This paper calls for a reconceptualization of empowerment frameworks with the aim of theorizing a robust role for men to act as allies in the process; such reconceptualization is urgently needed to redress conceptual weaknesses in empowerment theories, disrupt the

current narrative of essentialized gender binaries in the literature, and increase the impact of critical empowerment frameworks in practice. The failure to do so reproduces exclusions and gender dichotomies that feminists have struggled to overturn; images of feckless and violent men, as obstacles of empowerment, only serve to reproduce and embed gender essentialisms. I will argue that men's absence from empowerment can be redressed by a focus on gender power relations and return to empowerment theories' origins in radical social movements. Empowerment must re-situated within a broad social justice framework that stresses the benefits of gender equality and the common interests shared by men and women.

In recent years, recognition of this oversight has produced a small body of literature that considers the debates around men and their engagement in gender equality work. Advocates of men's engagement span development institutions (UN 2000; 2003; 2004, UNFPA 2009, UN Women 2011), civil society organizations/ NGOs (Peacock n.d., Kaufmann 2001; 2004, Murphy 2009) and academics in the field of development studies (Chant 2000, Cornwall 2000, White 1994; 1997, Cleaver 2002). Within the feminist development literature, GAD frameworks have been identified as the best mechanism for men's engagement because of GAD's intrinsic concern with gender relations. The key texts of empowerment theory (Kabeer 1994; Rowlands 1997; Agarwal 1995) focus mainly on women and do not dedicate a great deal of space to considering men in the process, while the current literature engaging men in development is not specifically concerned with the empowerment process (Cleaver 2003; White 2000; Cornwall 2000). These bodies of literature don't 'talk to each other'; this paper therefore aims to draw lessons from both and examine their intersections. While it is true that much of the Gender and Development literature has considered the importance of masculinities and male engagement in development, it is particularly important to consider the implications of this shift for empowerment theories, because of the continued prevalence of empowerment frameworks in development institutions. It is my contention that empowerment frameworks can be expanded to create space for men without losing their focus on women and, furthermore, strengthening their critical focus on gender relations.

This paper aims to accomplish three tasks: firstly, it identifies an oversight in the current empowerment literature that closes off possibilities for engaging men; secondly, it provides several objections to the exclusion and (mis)representation of men in the literature; thirdly, it suggest a few conceptual tools we might use to create space in empowerment theories for the

engagement of men as allies, not only as obstacles, to the process. This paper does not propose to overturn the entire theoretical body of empowerment literature, nor does it seek to eradicate women-only spaces or empowerment processes. At the conference where this paper was presented, Marysia Zalewski commented that feminists have already tried to create gender equality without men, but it hasn't worked, so now we are embracing the alternate strategy of engaging with men for gender equality. This paper is based on the premise that feminist aims can best be achieved when gender relations are transformed, changing the roles of both men women; it is based on the premise that imagining men as allies in gender equality is a more productive approach than casting them as either absent from the process or obstacles[3] to it.

The search for a role for men in empowerment speaks to debates about the potential for feminist critique to influence policy without undergoing the well-established process of cooption and conceptual emptying that previous frameworks have seen. The language of women's empowerment is ubiquitous in development and feminist literature; it is the development buzzword *par excellence*. Empowerment's co-option and de-politicization in development circles, in the manner of gender's de-politicization, has been extensively critiqued by feminists and the viability of empowerment discourse questioned. The loss of conceptual rigour and critical power in the translation from feminist theory into development policy has been a dispiriting, if unsurprising, consequence of the success of empowerment language. Critics have highlighted the soft-power focus of current empowerment approaches in development that stress the power-generating potential of individual economic participation in markets. I want to suggest that the failure to theorise a role for men in empowerment frameworks is part of empowerment's conceptual weakness that leaves it particularly vulnerable to co-option and de-politicization by mainstream institutions. Empowerment theories that ignore men's roles and relationships with women serve as easy targets for co-option because they neglect a robust critique of power relations and perpetuate empowerment's soft focus on gender power inequalities. Empowerment should return to its radical roots in order to 1) bring men into the picture and 2) regain the conceptual depth and critical focus that it has lost in translation into policy.

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[3] Thanks to Silja Bara Omarsdottir for suggesting the phrase 'absent obstacles' to characterize the current state of men in empowerment literature.

In this paper, I will first identify the role of men in empowerment by examining some representations of men in the literature. I will reflect on the implications of men's absence from theory and make the case for feminist concern with men's role in empowerment. The absence of men from empowerment theories, or their presence in those theories as violent oppressors and obstacles to the process are problematic for empowerment because they reproduce rigid gender dichotomies, homogenize men's experiences, and obscure gender oppression's location is an array of inequalities. Furthermore, they ignore the realities of women's lives and their relationships. Next, I will propose a reconsideration of two aspects of empowerment to create space for men in the process, without conceding feminist focus. I will explore the nature of power in empowerment and advocate for a critical focus on power relations via redistribution of power. Next, I will situate empowerment within a broader social justice framework and explore the potential for this approach to engage men as allies. In section V, I will bring together these points to suggest a way forward for theorizing empowerment that addresses men's exclusion. My intention is to suggest some starting points for a re-theorization of empowerment and to prompt a debate among feminist theorists about how best to engage men. I will conclude this section by addressing some of the ways that men can reconceptualise their roles in gender relations and can be incentivized to participate in empowerment processes. Engaging men in the empowerment process provides promising avenues for practice whereby women's empowerment can be connected to projects of wider social justice.

II. Violent, Irresponsible, Opportunistic: Representations of men in the literature

Frameworks for women's empowerment focus almost exclusively on women and their increased participation in political and economic life. In reviewing some of the most influential empowerment frameworks, there is very little mention of men's roles in the process. Kabeer (1994; 2001), Rowlands (1997), Moser (1993), and Agarwal (1997) place emphasis on women's increased control over choices and resources, by developing frameworks to promote their increased participation in political and economic spheres to accompany a shift in their self-perception. These frameworks, while highly influential in both feminist and institutional development literature, neglect a robust role for men in the process. Indeed, they construct men mainly as irrelevant to the process or obstacles to empowerment. This exclusion has persisted in empowerment theories and is reproduced across the

empowerment literature. When men do appear in the empowerment literature, they are represented primarily as obstacles to empowerment. Although feminists take great care to acknowledge the diversity of women's lived experience and the ways in which gender oppression intersects with race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and other identities, images of men in the literature are remarkably homogeneous. They are represented as agents of patriarchy, either uninterested in women's empowerment or, more often, threatened by its potential to diminish their control over the women in question. It is important to note that this portrayal often appears in contrast to the "cooperative, community-minded, caring women" (Cornwall 2000: 22). A careful consideration of the gendered essentialisms that characterize women in the literature is beyond the scope of this paper, but has been explored in several recent works (see Rankin 2001; Chakravarti 2008; Wilson 2011).

The absence of men that I identify in the literature is twofold. Firstly, men are absent from much of the theoretical literature, in that they are rarely mentioned in the empowerment process. Secondly, when men are represented, they tend to appear as obstacles to the empowerment of women around them. This exclusion therefore encompasses both a literal absence from literature and the absence of men as agents of their own empowerment or as allies of women's empowerment. Representations of men fall into several categories: violent men who oppose empowerment with force, irresponsible men who address their needs without regard for family or partners, and aggressively opportunities men who attempt to gain control the material benefits of the empowerment process for themselves.

1. Violent men

The first and perhaps most frequent representation of men in the literature is as violent and oppressive figure, often the primary obstacles to empowerment. Violent men appear in the literature as husbands, fathers, other male relatives, and community members who impede the empowerment process because they are threatened by the potential change in power relations it signals. Their opposition to empowerment is manifested in physical and sexual violence against women who challenge the gender power status quo. This figure appears often in the empowerment literature, framing the context in which empowerment interventions take place and the obstacles that women in the process face. Sumi Madhok and Shirin Rai details the brutal rape of Bhanwari Devi, a woman involved in mobilizing women in a rural Rajasthan

community and promoting new ideas about gender. Devi spread awareness against child marriage in her village, drawing police attention to a family where a child marriage was imminent. In retaliation for her involvement in attempting to prevent the marriage, several men in the village raped Devi. The police and judiciary showed near total disregard for the case, and the courts eventually acquitted all the suspects, explaining that upper caste men would not "defile themselves" by raping a lower caste women (Rai and Madhok 2012: 658, see also Madhok 2003; 2007). Devi's work with local women to end practices like child marriage, dowry, and spousal abuse so threatened men in her community that they employed physical and sexual violence to reassert their power. This pattern appears throughout the literature. In an empowerment program in Honduras, Jo Rowlands described the pervasive cultures of *machisimo*, alcohol, and violence as severely inhibiting of the empowerment process. One woman in the program was murdered by her male partner, and as a result other women in the program felt the pressure not to challenge the structure of their relationships. The legal impunity men enjoy compounds the danger to women in the empowerment process posed by violent partners and relatives (Rowlands 1997: 119). The men who react with violence perceive, rightly or wrongly, empowerment as threatening to their position of dominance and their control over women; their use of violence to reassert control disempowers women in new ways and compounds previous forms of oppression.

2. Irresponsible men

The second category of representation in the literature broadly encompasses men who are irresponsible, lazy, careless with family income, and uninvolved with family care. This man is represented as selfish and disinterested in the family, spending spare income on a gambling or alcohol. This is in contrast to the representation of women as inherently family-oriented and linked to the oft-cited claim that women are far more likely to reinvest their spare income in child health, nutrition, education, and general well-being. The first aspect of this representation to draw out is its characterization of men's trustworthiness with family finances; particularly within the microcredit literature, representations of men as irresponsible spenders abound. The literature suggests that although men may provide a source of income, they choose to spend it in such a way that the family cannot benefit (White 1994; Pahl 2008). Furthermore, scholars suggest that the success of microfinance depends on the establishment of savings accounts where profits can be deposited, to prevent the use for alcohol, gambling,

or other such expenses (Mayoux n.d.: 27). The second aspect of the 'irresponsible' man is his relationship to family: this man is represented as disinterested, disconnected, and incapable of contributing to the care of the family or performing any of the reproductive work that women are charged with in the gender status quo. When empowerment interventions disrupt the traditional gender roles by increasing women's participation in formal economic areas, gender relations in the home are unlikely to be affected. Even when the entire family depends on the income generated by women, Josephine Lairap Fonderson finds that "the male partners rarely take on the burden of household chores" (2002: 196). Productive and reproductive boundaries remain rigid within domestic confines, despite the impact of women's income. Reproductive work, inclusive of household chores and family care, continue to be considered women's work. This state of affairs recurs in studies of the impact of empowerment interventions and is reproduced across the literature. In contrast to the model of the violent and oppressive man, the irresponsible man appears not as an obstacle to empowerment, but as a burdensome dependent on the women who support him. His negligence threatens family well-being, worsens material deprivation, and impedes the empowerment process.

3. Opportunistic men

The third category of men encompasses those who seek to gain control over dividends of development interventions and empowerment projects for themselves and at the expense of women; they too appear most frequently in microcredit literature. There is enormous concern in this field for women's sole control over assets and the possibility that her investment and profits may be hijacked by male relatives and diverted for their purposes. Researchers have found that although women receive microcredit loans, it is often their husbands who control the investment and the revenue generated by it; in some cases, women are pressured into microcredit schemes by threats from their husbands (Goetz and Sen Gupta 1996; Rahmann 1999; Chant and Guttman 2002). These men are not opposed to the empowerment process so long as they can control the dividends of it, thus undermining its focus on female control over resources.

Within the empowerment literature, images of violent and oppressive men abound, while alternative representations of men are absent. This presents a double exclusion in that men are largely absent from the literature and, when they appear, are presented almost exclusively

as obstacles to the process. The possibility of men who are allies for gender equality or similarly oppressed by hegemonic masculinities is noticeably absent from empowerment theory. That is not to say that patriarchy and oppression do not exist: they are pervasive and structural to gender relations. Issues around inclusion/ exclusion of men are particularly difficult and emotive for feminists. The examples cited in the literature are true stories of violence, control, and domination exerted by men over women engaged in empowerment processes and provide evidence of the subordinate position of women in patriarchal societies. For some, these examples may simply show the problem: patriarchy is violent, oppressive, and pervasive; they may reinforce the conviction that men should be deliberately excluded in empowerment and could very well damage the success of any such program. However, my intention is to push the debate beyond the recognition of oppression to strategies for its transformation. The fact that patriarchy exists and that men participate in and benefit from it does not invalidate attempts to engage men in transformation of gender relations. This is in part because patriarchy disadvantages men as well as women, but also because a genuine transformation of gender relations is impossible without the participation of both groups in the relationship. In addition to changing representations, engaging men in empowerment has the potential to transform gender relations themselves.

III. The case for men: Why is their exclusion problematic?

Having established the exclusion of men from much of empowerment theory and the reductive and stereotypical representations that characterize men's limited presence in the literature, I want to move to explaining why this situation is problematic. Why should we be troubled by men's absence from empowerment frameworks, and how can their inclusion impact empowerment theory and practice? I will make the case for engaging men in empowerment approaches with three points: the first revolves around the potential for men's engagement to improve the practical impact of empowerment interventions; the second points out the exclusions that are reproduced when men are left out of empowerment; the third makes the case of the basis that men's exclusion weakens empowerment's critical approach.

1. Engaging men for practical reasons

In terms of the success of the empowerment approach, men's engagement is an important practical consideration. The involvement of men is important both because of the implications of their absence, and the advantages of their participation: while men's exclusion can seriously damage the success of empowerment interventions, men's involvement will contribute to the success of empowerment projects (Chant 2000: 10-1). While taking care to avoid instrumentalizing men as means to promoting empowerment's success, there are practical advantages to their engagement. Moreover, this engagement is not instrumental insofar as it is tied to a broader social justice agenda from which both men and women stand to gain.

Empowerment theories that create space for men's participation have an obvious advantage over those that exclude men, not only because men will benefit from gender equality, but because these inclusive approaches are more reflective of the social realities in which women live. Women are inextricably bound in a web of social relationships, many of which will be with men. Development discourse focused on women has incorrectly presumed that its "target group" exists as an isolated group located outside of social relations where its individual members are embedded (Cornwall 2000: 19). Gender power relations infiltrate every aspect of life, from which no individual can be apart. Feminist analyses have revealed gender's imbrication in relationships at every level of our experience, so empowerment theories' tendency for a narrow women-only focus is problematic. I want to draw attention to the importance of these relationships, not to perpetuate heteronormative narratives that have long underpinned development work with women, but instead to highlight the extent to which women's lives are lived among men, in relationships with men, and in societies structured by androcentric cultural/ social norms. Moreover, it is precisely the stark imbalance in gender power and resources that necessitates engagement with men. Men act as the "gatekeepers" (Connell 2005: 1802) for gender equality in that they control almost all of the resources needed to achieve equality. This proposition is a controversial one in empowerment theory because it casts doubt on a fundamental assumption of empowerment: that women, by generating power from within themselves and within women's organizations, can achieve empowerment and control over decisions and resources. By acknowledging that men may act as gatekeepers to this process, we must accept that generating power from within alone cannot be sufficient to transform gender relations. It is clear, then, that an empowerment

approach that engages men will be an empowerment approach that reconsiders the power content of empowerment. This discussion will follow in section IV.

A second practical reason for engagement of men relates to the potential for male exclusion from empowerment (and other gender equality frameworks) to provoke a backlash and create division between feminists and potential allies. Engagement of men in work for women's rights and equality is a delicate matter because of the possibility for misperception and opposition to arise between groups. Gender equality issues entered public discourse through feminist activism and women's rights campaigns and, as a result, gender equality is often regarded as a women's issue. When men are left out of this debate, R.W. Connell suggests, they can easily move into a 'backlash' posture of men's rights activism (Connell 2005: 1805-6). Men's rights is a broader movement that claims to address discrimination against men and, in some contexts, is unsupportive of or even detrimental to women's rights work (Clatterbaugh 2007: 430). Excluded from debates around gender equality by virtue of their focus on women, men may embrace the discourse of men's rights and its oppositional framework if they find it is the only way to address issues that men face. The potential for ostensible allies of feminist goals, excluded from debates about the transformation of patriarchy, to shift to an anti-woman position underscores the tensions in gender equality work and the importance of engagement of many (and at times contradictory) groups. This problem can be addresses by a re-conceptualization of gender equality debates in terms of equality's impact on both genders.

2. Exclusions embody feminist critique

The second rationale for men's engagement shifts from the practical to the more theoretical by speaking directly to feminist literature and critique. I want to address the ways in which exclusion of men from empowerment frameworks reproduces inequalities and embodies feminist critiques of women's representation/ exclusion in development discourse. This problem arises when we can identify representations in the literature that construct men as a single unified group that has shared interests and benefits equally from gender oppression. Critics of male engagement may argue that the representations I have cited in section II of this paper (of violent, oppressive, and opportunistic men) are based on evidence gathered by feminists working in the field, and are not baseless stereotypes that can be easily disregarded.

Feminist scholars have raised concerns about engagement of men and the potential for men's issues to crowd out feminist aims or rehabilitate oppressive ideologies and traditional masculinities (see Win 2001, White 2000). Others have highlighted perceived widespread resistance among men to gender equality and questioned the basis for their involvement (Kajifusa 1998). Critics may also claim that men are not interested in participation empowerment frameworks. They point to the lack of desire by men to engage with women for gender equality or to promote it at all. This criticism, again, does not invalidate my attempt to engage men. Feminists and theorists of empowerment will be well aware of the possibility for the disempowered to participate in their own oppression, and for this reason the development of a critical political consciousness is at the centre of leading empowerment approaches (Rowlands 1997, Khader 2011, Batliwala 1993). The fact that women can willingly participate in structures that oppress them and can, in turn, oppress other women marginalized by these structures has never stopped feminist theorists promoting women's empowerment. The concept of internalized oppression may be applied to men and their participation in hegemonic masculinities as well. Furthermore, while these criticisms of male engagement are well founded, they perpetuate a tendency to see men and men's interest as singular, fixed, and inherently anti-feminist. Feminists who reject men's engagement on the basis of gendered essentialisms about male nature make the same errors of homogenizing and essentializing men that early discourse around women in development made.

We cannot construct men as a unified and coherent group with common interests that exist in stark opposition to the interests of women; the concept of women's interests has been much critiqued for its homogenizing tendency, so this same critical gaze must be applied to representations of men. I want to briefly introduce a feminist framework that can help to structure the debate and help us to reflect feminist critique on representations of both genders. Referring to the construction of a universal set of 'women's interests', Saskia Wieringa identifies three objections that I argue must be applied to any similar construction of men and men's interests. Firstly, Wieringa implores us to ask who defines these interests and investigate the sources of authority. Secondly, she points to the shifting nature of interests across space and time. Finally, she claims that gender interests are constituted across various social and political contexts, and are usually subject to negotiation (1994: 836). If these objections stand for women, they are undoubtedly relevant for a study of men and their engagement. The application of this framework to men foregrounds the significance of their

multiple and intersecting identities, which condition their access to power and enjoyment of privilege. There can be little doubt that patriarchy exists and oppresses women around the world or that the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell 2005: 1808) accrues to men as a result of this oppression. The concept of patriarchal dividend refers to the surplus of resources – comprising wealth, respect, authority, power, and control – that men enjoy and the imbalance of which sustains patriarchy. However, this dividend is not distributed evenly: "the men who receive most of the benefits and the men who pay most of the costs are not the same individuals" (Ibid 1809). Class, race, ethnicity, age, and other factors condition men's experience of power and inequality just as they intersect with women's experience of gender oppression. Furthermore, male identities and masculinities are not fixed across time and space but can be transformed. If we are to advocate gender equality on the basis that patriarchy oppresses men and women alike, both in terms of the imposition of hegemonic masculinities and the relations between gender and other forms of oppression, we must first acknowledge the potential for men to act as allies for equality.

3. Empowerment's conceptual/ critical strength

In the previous two sections, I have addressed practical and normative justifications for the inclusion of men in empowerment frameworks; I will now lay out one further case for men in empowerment that relates to theoretical concerns around empowerment and its critical strength. There are points to highlight here: the first is that empowerment theories that exclude men forfeit a robust critique of gender power relations, focusing instead on individuals and women divorced from social reality. Subsequently, having shed its critical focus on power structures, empowerment theories are more vulnerable to co-option and de-politicization by mainstream/ malestream development organizations.

Empowerment frameworks that create space for men provide a stronger theoretical focus on gender power relations, while a narrow focus on women tends to crowd out these relational critiques. This contention is familiar because it draws on previous critiques of Women in Development frameworks by advocates of Gender and Development. GAD advocates rejected the integrationist approach whereby women were inserted into male-dominated programs; instead, they sought to provide a lens for critique of gender relations and the exercise of power at every level of the development process. However, 'gender' and 'women'

were collapsed in development discourse and a women-only focus reinstated (see Baden and Goetz 1997; Pearson and Jackson 1998); nonetheless, the GAD critique is still enormously relevant for theorizing critical approaches to development. The theoretical case for men's inclusion in empowerment draws on this logic: power relations between men and women cannot be transformed without a critical focus on the distribution of power, resources, and control. Gender inequality implies an imbalance of power between groups and the negotiation of power in a social world that cannot be simplified as in women-only approaches. This will result, as WID frameworks did, in malestream projects that create (discursive) space for women but wholly fail to address power inequalities.

Empowerment's adoption of a critical focus on gender will strengthen its conceptual power and rehabilitate aspects of early empowerment theories that stressed the identification of power mechanisms in everyday life. Without this attention to the operation of power, empowerment becomes nothing more than a 'buzzword' – an empty shell for development policy as usual. Buzzwords are particular terms taken up in development discourse that gain rhetorical power through their ability to appeal to diverse interests groups, represent often conflicting interests, and absorb shifts in meaning (Cornwall and Brock 2005). They derive power from their perceived ambiguity, because they work on two levels: while buzzwords are concepts that, in the abstract, can be agreed upon by various interest groups, there is always contestation about their precise meaning. The success of a buzzword is dependent on its euphemistic quality and "normative resonance" (Cornwall and Eade 2010: 5), as it functions to promote some degree of political consensus while still allowing for competing internal agendas. Empowerment, as a development buzzword with considerable conceptual space for manoeuvre, allows diverse and oppositional groups to adopt a shared language; advocates of alternative development can embrace empowerment language through its linkage with participatory rhetoric, while development economists and advocates of neoliberal economic interventions adopt empowerment language to signal the power of individualism and entrepreneurship

Women's empowerment as a development concept is, to a large extent, a victim of its own success: it is now widespread in development discourse but has little theoretical weight because it is so easily co-opted and reinterpreted by different institutions and actors. Empowerment is a "motherhood term" (Parpart, Rai, and Staudt 2002): it evokes positive

connotations of women exerting (vague) power, participation, community, and grassroots action – all of these terms operating as buzzwords for alternative development discourses – without mandating any specific course of action. The re-theorization of empowerment with space for men's engagement cannot totally rehabilitate empowerment from its buzzword status, but it can go some way towards injecting critical focus back into the concept. This is particularly true of an empowerment framework that sought to transform gender power relations by linking gender issues to a broader social justice agenda.

I have laid out several objections to empowerment theories that fail to engage with men, both in terms of the negative impact of their exclusion and the potential benefits of men's inclusion. Practically, engaging men for gender equality can increase the impact of empowerment interventions. Men are not only present in social life, but by virtue of the patriarchal dividend, they exert considerable power over the process and must therefore be fully considered. This practical consideration is compounded by normative claims: men's inclusion in gender equality work is desirable because of the extent to which men are disadvantaged by the current gender order. Men's inclusion in empowerment recognizes the diversity of their experience and the way that class, race, religion, age affect male identity and power, and other forms of discrimination. Once we recognize that not all men benefit equally from patriarchy, we can begin to theorize new inclusive ways to promote gender equality. Finally, I have linked men's engagement in empowerment to the processes of co-option and de-politicization that have plagued it (and other feminist concepts) in malestream development. Empowerment's status as development buzzword derives partly from its failure to look critically at power structures and gender relations; a re-theorization of empowerment that returns to explicit concerns with power, marginalization, and structural oppression can conceptually strengthen it and perhaps inject new power in the concept.

IV. Power Relations and Social Justice

Having established men's general absence from empowerment theory and problematic representations that occur in the literature, and subsequently explained why this absence is problematic for men, feminists, and empowerment theorists, I will now move to the re-theorization of empowerment. This re-theorization will firstly involve a consideration of the nature and role of power in empowerment. I will examine two accounts of power in

empowerment theory, arguing for the adoption of a zero-sum conception of power in gender relations and a redistributive approach to power in empowerment. I will then link this to the argument for a social justice approach to empowerment.

1. Power in Empowerment

The nature of power in theories of empowerment is complex and contested, as it is throughout feminist theory (see Allen 1999, Cheater 1999). Empowerment theorists have developed a basic framework for power that seeks to outline a variety of different kinds of power, involved in both oppression and empowerment. Nonetheless, there is little consensus on the issue and the powers identified here are understood and applied differently across the literature. Four main powers comprise the framework: 'power over,' 'power to,' 'power with,' and 'power from within.' Power over generally refers to domination, although it can include internalized oppression; this kind of power is generally understood to be the cause of disempowerment. Feminist conceptions of 'power over refer to women's power over resources or forms of resistance. The second form – 'power to' – is productive power that is the product of empowerment, conscientization, and mobilization. This conception of 'power to' is closely tied to the third form, 'power with', or collective action/ solidarity. Empowerment theories tend to imagine collective action as a means to exert 'power to' in the form of activism and making political demands. Fourthly, 'power from within' refers to the power derived from individual empowerment and generated internally through the empowerment process, by overcoming internalized oppression. There is little consensus in the empowerment literature about the precise nature of power as a force in disempowerment or empowerment (For discussions of the power framework, see Rowlands 1997, Wong 2003, Cheater 1997, Mosedale 2005, Kabeer 1994). While Jo Rowlands claims that any of the above four types of power can result from empowerment (though not all are required for empowerment to have been achieved, Naila Kabeer focuses specifically on power from within to describe the psychological process by which women improve their ability to determine their interests and make decisions (Rowlands 1998: 14-5: Kabeer 1994: 228-9). The power focus of numerous empowerment theories falls more heavily on questions of self-reliance and self-perception, contributing to psychological aspects of empowerment but neglecting relational analysis (Moser 1993; Agarwal 1997; Keller and Mbwewe 1991). The empowerment literature quickly becomes muddied because of conceptual confusion and a

proliferation of empowerments, each with distinct understandings of power and its relation to empowerment. Furthermore, the lack of clarity around power is manifested in disagreement about the extent of empowerment's transformation of women and their social relations. If empowerment means only 'power to' articulate and express one's own wishes, the aims of the empowerment process will be far less transformative than an empowerment process which envisions freedom from 'power over' as its outcome.

Looking toward a re-theorization of men's roles in empowerment, we are interested in an issue that the four aspects of power detailed above fail to engage with: where does power come from? How is it generated? The contention that empowered women can generate power from within to resist oppressive power over them assumes that power requires no negotiation, only self-generation. However, this assumption requires careful consideration: Is power expansible or zero-sum? I will argue here for empowerment theory to adopt a zero-sum approach to power, refocusing empowerment on a critical study of power relations and advocating a vision of empowerment as power redistribution. Few empowerment approaches directly deal with the questions around power as an infinitely expansible resource or a zero-sum negotiation. They are largely concerned with how power manifests itself, either an oppressive or emancipatory force, thus failing to engage with power as a quantity that exists in all social relations.

Empowerment theories that envision power as an infinitely expansible resources and stress the development of power from within tend to reproduce the conservative assumptions of institutional development approaches that shy away from transformative frameworks. While empowerment approaches assume an imbalance in power between genders, those that fail to directly address negotiation and redistribution of power fall short. A view of power as zero sum places emphasis on distribution and control of resources and authority over decision-making. It envisions power as a process of negotiation between competing actors, where power held by one actor over another results in disempowerment. This conception stresses control of resources, rather than vocality or participation, as the substance of power (Cheater 1999: 6). A view of power as infinitely expansible is compatible with liberal democratic and free market approaches because of its emphasis on vocality as power (Ibid 7). It avoids questions of distribution by adopting a fluid notion of power that can be generated from within the individual or collective. Although this 'warm fuzzy' approach is popular with

feminist theorists and mainstream development institutions alike, it works to erase imbalances in allocation of resources and decision-making. Empowerment theorists should reject this account of power because of its weak conceptual lens on gender and relational power: in contexts of domination and oppression, power from within, generated by psychological transformation, will likely have little impact against structures of patriarchy that control resources and life choices.

Srilatha Batliwala provides a concise and explicit correction to this flaw, and her conception of power is one that I propose to adopt. Batliwala recognizes the tension between a critical focus on gender relations (particularly at the household level) and empowerment frameworks with expansible conceptions of power; furthermore, she recognizes the tendency for empowerment approaches to take a soft focus on power and avoid structural issues. Therefore, she argues that if women's empowerment is to be a success, it "does mean the loss of men's traditional power and control over women in their households" (1993: 9). As a woman becomes empowered, her husband will lose powers he previously had, such as control of her body, mobility, work, sexuality, and so on. Power, Batliwala claims, is not infinitely expansible but must be negotiated in the household; empowerment must mean a loss of a man's 'power over' a woman, though she argues that this new gender role can liberate men as well. Building on her claim, I argue that this non-expansible vision of power is applicable at all levels of the empowerment process – from family, to household, to community, to political life – and that the re-negotiation of power in these realms, while fundamental to the success of empowerment. Moreover, the redistribution of power does not necessarily disempower those who lose some power. A man whose wife/ partner gains control over her reproductivity, through the use of contraceptives or other medical means, loses a power he might have previously held. If he used force or the threat of force to control her reproductive choices, this man was holding 'power over' his wife that he loses when she gains this power. However, we cannot say that this man is disempowered: the loss of power over his wife's reproductivity in no way constitutes the exercise of oppressive 'power over' him, nor does it limit his ability to exercise 'power to' decide matters about his own body. The redistribution of power entailed in a zero-sum approach to power does not necessarily mandate the disempowerment of one actor in relation to another, newly empowered actor. It is this nuanced approach to relational power between men and women that lies at the heart of a re-theorized and inclusive empowerment.

Feminist theorists who advocate the engagement of men have generally rejected this zero sum conception of power. They have argued that men will be unlikely to participate in processes of women's empowerment which will result in their own disempowerment (Chant 2000, Redman 1994). While I have shown above that women's empowerment is not coterminous with men's disempowerment, there is certainly a danger of this false perception alienating men. The fear that a zero-sum approach to power will create a backlash against men is a valid one, and although it does not invalidate this approach, it complicates the process. It requires that any empowerment framework relate to social justice broadly, and gender justice specifically. Power is not infinitely expansible, but this does not mean that power imbalance and domination are inevitable. The adoption of a zero sum conception of power and a focus on empowerment as redistribution of power could potentially disenfranchise men, if they were to perceive this process as threatening. For this reason, any re-theorization of empowerment that proposes to engage men should also situate empowerment within a broad social justice framework.

2. Empowerment as social justice

I argue for situating empowerment within a broader social justice framework where common interests can be identified and benefits of power redistribution can be identified, as well as where the sources of oppression and inequality can be linked to patriarchy and economic systems. Empowerment began as a movement to criticize structural power relations and to link the goals of marginalized people through mobilization – it should return to these origins in order to unite men and women for gender equality. A social justice approach to women's empowerment would highlight the relationship between patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, and hegemonic political relations. Gender oppression is closely related to social and economic deprivation, and therefore cannot be addressed in isolation.

This approach corrects a number of flaws identified in current empowerment approaches. Firstly, it provides space men in the process without abandoning feminist aims. Secondly, it strengthens empowerment frameworks by building a critique of gender power relations into the core of the framework, thus ending empowerment's vulnerability to rhetorical co-option within dominant institutional policies. Finally, it directly addresses the imbalance of power in gender relations by advocating redistribution of power and thus calling upon men to

transform their own roles. Empowerment frameworks that employ on a zero sum conception of power will inevitably require processes of negotiation, redistribution, and transformation of power relations. While this may damage the popularity of empowerment rhetoric in malestream institutions, it will also return to empowerment the radical power critique it once posed. It would rehabilitate empowerment from its de-politicized and neoliberal incarnations by prompting a return to early frameworks associated with radical social movements.

Early uses of empowerment theories were confined to movements that sought social change on behalf of groups marginalized on the basis of class, race, and gender. Empowerment sought a shift in power relations – from top-down to bottom-up – whereby the disempowered could speak for themselves and participate in the processes that impact them. Paolo Freire's radical pedagogy provided the theoretical basis for empowerment in its early manifestations, promoting the transformation of power structures in a process that would begin with the identification of power structures and one's place in them. Conscientization, by which the poor would become aware of the power structures that dominated them, was designed to inspire the poor to challenge the status quo. Early theories of empowerment developed in conjunction with critical analyses of social structure and subordination, closely linked to Freirian, Gramscian and post-colonial discourses; post-colonial theorists used theories of the subaltern to critique the intersectionality of gender, class, and colonial oppression (See Batliwala 2011, Triantafillou and Risbjerg 2001, Miraftab 2004). The overall aim of empowerment as a tool of radical movements was the transformation of the conditions of deprivation and the power structures that enabled and sustained inequality. The most important aspect of early empowerment theories to pull out and rehabilitate in new frameworks is the concern with the interconnection and overlapping of multiple forms of oppression, all of which are self-sustaining. The concept of intersectionality provides a starting point for this model, although its focus on intersections as overlapping or additive does not fully reflect the social justice framework I propose, which instead looks at relational inequalities and how they constitute/ magnify each other.

V. Re-Theorizing Empowerment

An empowerment framework that looks to engage men in the process, while retaining critical focus, will therefore adopt a zero sum conception of power and a broad social justice

framework. In this section, I want to draw together these strands and suggest a starting point for the re-theorization process. I suggest three specific points to integrate into empowerment frameworks: 1) the conscientization process must engage men and women alike, 2) facilitators should work to develop common interests between men and women, and 3) redistribution of power must be central to the process.

My overall approach is based on the contention that the current system of gender relations is disadvantageous to men, so it follows that the first step in engaging men in the process is to encourage the recognition of this disadvantage. This should involve men and women alike participating in conscientization and Consciousness Raising groups, by which they can link personal and political. The conscientization process is well-established as the first step in the empowerment process (Rowlands 1994, more); I propose extending this to include men, whether in single-sex groups running parallel or in a large mixed group. Subsequently, gender inequalities identified in conscientization should be linked to patriarchy, though the analysis should push further to identifying the way that patriarchy constrains men. This leads into the second point: a central aim of conscientization should be the development of common interests between men and women. The operation of patriarchy should be linked to economic, political, and social structures that oppress women and men alike. An intersectional approach to inequality is crucial to linking interests across gender and other social cleavages. Together, these two points are intended to facilitate the development of common interests linked to a social justice agenda. This identification of interests, however, is not sufficient to be called empowering. The empowerment process cannot be considered successful unless a redistribution of power occurs and gender roles in the group are transformed. The identification of patriarchal oppression and power relations is not enough to change power relations; this is the most difficult point in empowerment processes that engage men. Without the redistribution of power, no empowerment cannot occur. It is incumbent upon the conscientization process, therefore, to show men how they too are constrained by the current system of gender relations and the possibility for a redistribution of power that will result in a mutually beneficial equality. I propose these points as a jumping-off point for a re-theorization of empowerment I propose will create space to integrate men into the process of conscientization, interest-identification, and action for change, without compromising empowerment's critical focus on transforming patriarchal relations.

The identification of empowerment as part of a broader social justice agenda intends to highlight the links between gender inequality and other kinds of inequality that may impact more upon men; it shows how different forms of oppression are interlinked. The empowerment process, however, is so fundamentally centered on the renegotiation of gender power relations that it must first engage men in the struggle for gender equality. There have been numerous movements for social justice (read: political and economic justice for men) that have marginalized questions of gender inequality and relegated feminist concerns to the back burner. Women's empowerment cannot occur in a vacuum; women live in the social world of which men are a part, and thus their interests should factor into any theory of empowerment as social justice. Nonetheless, the process I advocate puts women and their empowerment (read: freedom from domination) at the very center.

VI. Concluding Thoughts

The framework presented is by no means constitutive of a holistic framework for the empowerment process, but it provides the first steps in a process of re-theorization by which empowerment frameworks can be adapted. I have identified a gap in the empowerment literature and presented some ways that we can reconceptualise empowerment theories to address this gap. This approach represents a new generation of feminist activism that focuses on men as allies and presenting a diverse range of roles for men. It seeks a total transformation of gender roles, both male and female, but does require the renegotiation of power relationships.

To conclude, I will present a few last thought on the strategic value of this move towards inclusive re-theorization of empowerment. The trend of engaging men and boys in gender work has swept through development institutions and is the target of a significant amount of funding UN (2004, 2009), Ruxton (2004). Male engagement is a popular new development trend and has the potential to overtake focus on women or to stream away gender from the programs and shift the focus to men. Critics have raised this point and it may be the case in some circumstances. I want to make a pragmatic case to feminist activists that we must, firstly, acknowledge this funding shift and the donor desire for a framework inclusive of both men and women, and secondly, strategically adapt feminist frameworks so as not to be co-opted or marginalized by this shift. Men's engagement as allies for gender justice is good in

itself, because men will be beneficiaries of gender equality. However, feminist recognition of the strategic need to adapt and embrace this funding trend will help to ensure feminist stewardship of the concepts and frameworks used here. In other words, given the current funding shifts, men and boys are being placed at the center of frameworks for development; we must work to ensure that feminist frameworks provide this space, so that empowerment concepts are not wholly appropriated and de-politicized by ambivalent or anti-feminist groups.

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