Gender Equity Programming Cycle

The Need for Effective Programming that Enhances Gender Equity

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................ 4
Strategy Recommendations .......................................................................................... 6
Literature Review ........................................................................................................... 18
References .................................................................................................................... 39
Abstract:
Addressing global gender equity through strategic, programmable recommendations should be an ongoing objective for the international community, state governments, NGOs, and non-profit organizations alike. What follows is a guide to use in the planning and implementation stages before mechanisms aiming to increase gender equity are launched. The Gender Equity Programming Cycle starts with the foundation that as humans, women are ends in themselves. Next, three conceptual themes that are crosscutting and crucial areas of consideration for effective gender programming will be applied through the lens of the foundation—cultural relativism, identities, and language. Then, targeted mechanisms and programming aimed at engaging and working with youth can be created, reflecting the comprehensive research beforehand and the overall objective of effective gender equity programming. Finally, the program cycle should be constantly strengthened by a feedback loop of monitoring and evaluation, followed by any changes to programming appropriate to the environment.

Humanist Approach: Women as an End
All humans have a right to a set of entitlements (such as a right to bodily integrity) that are required to live a life dignified as human. Humans, regardless of their gender, should be seen as whole and equal, where emphasis is placed on the freedom to choose and an equal right to being understood and valued as an end. By remembering that as humans, women are ends in themselves, three cross-cutting themes were uncovered: cultural relativism, identities, and language. These themes will aid Freedom House in dissecting the complex and varying factors that influence a person’s gender identity, and developing gender equity programming that encompasses the needs of multiple and diverse gender identities.
Framework, Mechanism, and M & E

Framework: Cultural Relativism
Globalization and international actors have created pressures on states to change their laws to better protect universal human rights. However, many societies place a higher value on customary law and tradition. Bearing in mind cultural differences, Freedom House will be able to use their detection and cataloging methods to more adequately address the needs of local organizations implementing gender equity programming and espousing the importance of human rights. Gender equity programs will fail if the target population is at risk of backlash due to an outsider underestimation of cultural norms and values.

Framework: Language
Practitioners and agencies use different definitions of the word “gender.” This term also does not translate well in numerous cultures and languages, making it extremely difficult to maintain a clear and consistent dialogue on the subject. A person’s gender is subject to great variability and influence, resulting in multiple masculinities and femininities that often fail to be recognized and incorporated into traditional definitions of the word “gender.” It is unfeasible to establish one universal word or collection of words and definitions that is applicable in every circumstance. However, it is attainable for Freedom House to scrutinize the language it uses, within every context, to ensure the greatest level of understanding.

Mechanism: Engaging Youth
In working with young girls, Freedom House can encourage them to reflect on traditional forms of masculinities, how those masculinities influence their lives, and how to avoid perpetuating or reinforcing them within their personal relationships. Working specifically with young boys is an especially vital yet underrepresented initiative. Freedom House can create programs that are venues for boys to explore their personal gender identities - whatever that means to them. Such venues create safe spaces, which allow boys to feel “cool” for caring about gender equity. It is never too early to begin the process of deconstructing traditional gender norms. Nursery schools, for example, should encourage boys and girls to explore toys and activities that they are not usually exposed to (i.e., dolls for boys and toy cars for girls), setting foundations of non-sexist language and attitudes. Freedom House should consider institutionalizing supported youth and adolescent programs by developing them into curricula that can be incorporated into schools.

Monitoring/Evaluation (M&E):
Monitoring and evaluation is iterative, ongoing, and should occur throughout all phases of a project. What is gained from M&E should be used to help re-design project activities, develop better monitoring processes, implement again, and then re-evaluate. With this plan as part of the Cycle, the programs can still be flexible enough to adjust to environmental factors. The compelling results garnered from the M&E process can also help inform a global audience.

The Gender Equity Programming Cycle is only the first step along the journey to create an equitable international community. The cycle is flexible enough to allow for changes after analysis of M&E data, in addition to functioning top-down and bottom-up in its approach. Freedom House will be able to offer innovative strategies to grassroots organizations who will then return feedback to improve the functionality of the cycle. The binaries surrounding the term gender must be further analyzed in order to effectively include the LGBTI community and those with physical or mental disabilities. Although these groups are largely left out of the current dialogue, it is imperative that, in keeping with human rights frameworks, they are given a voice as well. Annual reformulation of the Cycle should eventually allow for this inclusion.

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Strategy Recommendations

Introduction

Addressing global gender equity through strategic, programmable recommendations should be an ongoing objective for the international community, world governments, non-governmental organizations, and non-profit organizations alike. With endless factors to take into consideration concerning gender—what it means, how it should be used to describe individuals and/or groups, its limitations—there has been great difficulty in implementing programs that enhance gender equity globally. What follows are not specific strategy recommendations to increase gender equity internationally, but rather a guide to use in the planning and implementation stages before mechanisms aiming to increase gender equity are launched. It is our hope that Freedom House is able to review our justifications for our suggested Gender Equity Programming Cycle, noting our previous research and adding its own research dimensions, and ultimately use this tool widely as a guide to improve overall programming in enhancing gender equity globally.

Gender Equity Programming Cycle

Freedom House acts as a catalyst for freedom through a combination of analysis, advocacy, and action. The action component of Freedom House’s mission statement reflects a commitment to effective programming that advances freedom and human rights all over the world. Freedom House’s moral fight for global gender equity and the recognition of women’s rights as human rights represents an especially promising opportunity to bolster such programming. In order to facilitate cohesion and best practices in the implementation of all of Freedom House’s gender equity programs, a conceptual framework is necessary at the beginning of program creation. It is vital that Freedom House’s program creators, facilitators, and implementers—whether located “on-the-ground” or at Freedom House headquarters—have a common understanding of the themes, content, and actions that are best suited for transformative interventions that have a positive impact on gender equity. With this understanding, the Gender Equity Programming Cycle has been formulated to be a useful tool that outlines where the necessary points of emphasis are for the process of gender equity program creation.

In the Gender Equity Programming Cycle, the ultimate objective is to help Freedom House create effective programming that enhances gender equity. In terms of best practices, the foundation of gender equity programming should begin with a common understanding that as humans, women are ends in themselves. This common understanding should be applied to three vital themes, which make up the conceptual framework—cultural relativism, identities, and language. These three themes were identified after extensive research into the literature on gender equity. They are crosscutting and crucial areas of consideration for effective gender programming. Freedom House’s expertise in research and analysis provides the organization with the capacity to more thoroughly research the conceptual framework within each locality, country, or region where it plans to implement programming. With a firm grasp of the
conceptual framework in hand, Freedom House practitioners and program creators can better
design mechanisms and programming targeting youth. Freedom House’s commitment to
advocacy and action coupled with developing the “hearts and minds” of youth and adolescents
present especially ripe opportunities for enhancing gender equity. “Questions for Consideration”
are included after each stage in the cycle as an informal means of verification for assessing how
well Freedom House is incorporating each piece of the cycle in its program design and
implementation. Finally, the targeted interventions towards youth that are undergirded by a
strong conceptual framework, can contribute to the ultimate objective of effective gender equity
programming. The tool is called a “cycle” in order to express the fluidity of the program
creation process, which should be constantly strengthened by a feedback loop of monitoring and
evaluation, followed by any necessary changes to programming as appropriate to the
environment.
Foundation of the Gender Equity Programming Cycle

Remembering that as Humans, Women are Ends in Themselves
Human rights are moral assertions of what “should be done” (Sen, 2009, pp. 357). Human rights discourse is grounded largely on the premise that humans are afforded some rights by the very nature of being human, and that there is an expectation that society must honor those entitlements (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 62). For this reason, all gender identities are entitled to human rights, and those rights should be encapsulated within the broader framework of the rights and freedoms entitled to all humans. The level of access or “capability” a person has in doing the things that he or she values is a way of measuring the level of freedom and opportunity a person has to make choices for their life (Sen, 2009, pp. 231-232). The lack of freedom women and other subordinate groups have in exercising their human capabilities is fundamental and even more important than discussing their superficial access to goods (Sen, 1992, pp. 124-125). Women are often treated as a means to someone else’s end, rather than having the freedom to lead their own dignified life (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 5-6). All humans have a right to these entitlements (such as a right to bodily integrity) that are required to live a life dignified as human (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 71-72). Humans (regardless of their gender) should be seen as whole and equal (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 86), where emphasis is placed on the freedom to choose and an equal right to being understood and valued as an end (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 18).

As a leader in the field of promoting human rights through analysis, advocacy, and action, Freedom House is in a unique position to create and sustain real global change. First and foremost, each human being should possess the right to exercise the freedoms that make that individual dignified and fully human. Freedom House has the power to advance not just women’s positions in society, but all individuals, respecting their individual gender identity, and by recognizing each person in the world as an end in himself or herself. At its most basic level, there are a variety of ways human beings currently serve as a means to someone else’s end. For example, women across the globe are disproportionately responsible for household work, raising children, and caring for the sick and elderly. Having this responsibility greatly reduces women’s ability to contribute their voices to public and political discourses or participate in the formal economy. Having equal freedom to pursue public discourse and participation in the economy are two universal entitlements that women require to live dignified lives. Advocating for the legal right to vote and the right to participate in the public and economic sectors may make those rights available to women, but it does not necessarily translate to women’s freedom to choose and exercise those rights.

As Freedom House engages in human rights discourse and grapples with implementing effective gender equity programming, action should firmly be grounded in valuing women, and all humans, as ends. Programming must dig deeper into what gives human beings the right to make choices about what is valuable in their life and how communities of individuals value and
support the choices of those individuals. For example, initiating a mentoring program to engage and support women in political participation and increased presence in government positions is one avenue for securing women’s rights. However, this initiative only targets a small piece of what infringes upon women’s political participation (e.g. support and lack of a role model). This type of initiative may only target those women who already have the freedom to pursue or capability of pursing the right to public discourse. This initiative is extremely important, but it may also neglect a whole population of women who face additional (and often invisible) barriers in accessing this type of program.

Patriarchy and male dominance extend to relationships in households, impacting women’s education and participation in the formal economy (Oberhauser, 1999, pp. 95-97). These barriers can lead to isolation from the community, making access to resources and external support challenging. Patriarchal and hegemonic masculinity systems have long dominated and oppressed women and many men, but it is not only male domination that leads to women’s and subordinate men’s vulnerabilities. Active compliance from women within patriarchal systems often fuels the perpetual cycle (Lerner, 1986, pp. 217). Freedom House should explore the complex ways in which women are barred from exercising their freedom of choice (on a deeper, more fundamental level) and consider targeting those areas. By remembering that as humans, women are ends in themselves at the foundation of program design, Freedom House can consider the three vital themes of the conceptual framework, which demand attention: cultural relativism, identities, and language. Exploration of these three areas helps dissect the complex and varying factors that influence a person’s gender identity, and to ultimately develop gender equity programming that encompasses the needs of multiple and diverse gender identities. This starting point allows Freedom House to be firm with the assertion and expectation of understanding that all human beings are ends, while allowing for some flexibility in a more comprehensive approach to targeting gender equity.

Questions for Consideration:

- How does the current initiative value women as Ends? All humans as Ends?
- What are the universal human rights necessary for a dignified human life?
- How do these universal human rights transcend culture, region, etc.?
- Do all people have equal access to universal human rights? Who does not? Why?
- Do women have equal access to these universal human rights?
- What assumptions are in place about individual’s familial, societal, religious, etc. roles?
- Who are the people and what are the systems in place supporting individuals in exercising activities that dignify human life?
- What are the barriers to viewing women as ends? How can these barriers be targeted?
- “Women valued as an ends”—What does this look like? How will/does Freedom House demonstrate success?
Conceptual Framework

Keeping Human Rights Applicable in Culturally Relative Situations
The universality of human rights versus the protection of traditional cultural practices has long been debated amongst scholars and practitioners. In recent decades, greater globalization has allowed for interconnectivity between once remote and traditional societies and the Western world, in turn decreasing the means of legitimization of inequitable practices. A common defense of cultural relativism is based on the Western notion of freedom of choice and freedom from judgment by external cultures (Afkhami, 2002, pp. 240). Nussbaum notes that cultural relativism is often mistaken as an attempt to respect another culture, but in doing so, often results in higher levels of intolerance (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 48-49). In addition, although states may legally support gender equity and universal human rights due to global norms and pressures, societies and individuals within the states often continue to uphold customary laws (Donnelly, 2007, pp. 291-292). A few of the inequitable practices defended on cultural grounds are female genital mutilation (FGM), gender-based violence (GBV), sexist inheritance laws, son preference, and discriminatory political participation. In order to reconcile this debate, proposing human rights as an ethical approach instead of a legal framework has created compelling results in actualizing human rights (Sen, 2009, pp. 365-366). This approach allows for the recognition of important traditional values and the varying existing definitions of human rights without discounting inherent shared civil liberties (Sen, 2012).

Respect for human rights must remain a global priority. Therefore, in order to effectively implement a more ethical human rights approach, traditional cultural practices and values should be considered. By being mindful of key cultural differences, Freedom House has the ability to espouse an ethically based human rights framework without diluting its goal of universal equity. Capitalizing on the ethical foundation of human rights as the moral protection of a society for the betterment of the whole, Freedom House is able to better understand and address cultural sensitivities and violations of human rights. Specifically, this framework would aid in changing the negative connotation that promotion of human rights is a Western and individualistic ideology that contradicts strong community based norms. Since Freedom House stresses effective detection and cataloging of human rights violations, understanding cultural norms will better equip them to support local organizations fighting to end these abuses. In order to facilitate effective gender analysis, an ethical human rights approach should be mindful of how local organizations are framing gender issues. In addition, unpacking existing cultural baggage via analysis of body language and participant observation, may highlight critical gaps within their gender context. Although cultural norms are often entrenched and change very slowly, the way in which Freedom House addresses global gender inequalities, via cultural awareness, will undoubtedly influence local and international organizations to take note.
It is also vital for Freedom House to espouse that cultural notions of masculinity are not only supported by males across the globe, but that women play a key role in the support and survival of these often oppressive masculine identities. For example, within a culture that values males as primary protectors, females may disregard a relationship with a male who has chosen a life of nonviolence. Masculine protection is often characterized and facilitated through violent and aggressive means, and therefore a male who fails to meet those standards may be alienated and undesired for acting in a culturally feminine manner. In areas that practice FGM, it is the women who often most staunchly defend the practice. Mothers and grandmothers believe that their daughters are not pure, beautiful, or marriageable if they do not undergo the practice. The same fares for women who perpetuate the identity of the “good wife” as submissive and deserving of GBV. Women are equally as important to target as sources of the problem and possible agents of change rather than viewing them as defenseless victims.

Lastly, emphasizing “ethics” in a human rights approach establishes culture as an important lens through which programming errors are made visible. It is crucial that Freedom House bear in mind possible security threats that their program may have upon the target community. Programs that are often well intentioned but culturally inept may lead to harsh backlash towards the target population by opposition groups. For example external involvement in Afghanistan post 9/11, which focused on increasing women’s political participation and agency, in effect caused extensive physical security threats to the women involved in equity promotion after the non-governmental organization’s protection was no longer present (Abirafeh, 2007, pp. 85). Gender equity programs should never jeopardize the physical safety of its participants. Truly lasting change is fostered within the absence of fear.

Questions for Consideration:

- What are the origins of the target community’s traditions? What meanings—ethical, social, and political—do they hold?
- Will this program leave the target population vulnerable to backlash when we leave the area?
- Are there roles, norms, and/or identities outside of gender that must first be openly discussed before addressing gender equity?
- What can the failures and successes of previous equity efforts tell us about the community’s understanding of “gender equity”?
- What stigmas, if any, does the community associate with universality?

Identities

Groups and individuals identify themselves in a multitude of ways, including sex, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation to name a few. Many scholars, academics, and practitioners have examined varying identities that encompass an individual throughout countless literatures. In particular, feminist
theories like multiracial/multiethnic feminism and feminist studies of men have contributed to
many understandings of an individual or a group identity. Multiracial/multiethnic feminism
examines discrimination through the intersection of race, ethnicity, social class, and gender,
pushing society to challenge and address the differences among women and multiple systems of
domination (Collins, 1998; Lorber, 2012). Feminist studies of men have studied hegemonic
masculinity and the various differentiations of masculinities, recognizing the status of men who
are disadvantaged by race, ethnicity, social class, etc. (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005;
Lorber, 2012; Alsop, Fitzsimmons, and Lennon, 2002). Most societies have status quo identities
expected of men, women, boys, and girls, related to structural gender norms. For example, for a
man in the United States to be considered “masculine”, he would ideally be aggressive, strong,
heterosexual, etc., while a woman in the United States who is expected to fit the norm of
“femininity” would be passive, submissive, graceful, the primary caregiver of children, etc.

The word “gender” is seldom used to address identities comprehensively. Most commonly, the
misuse of the term gender is perpetuated in two ways: (1) people tend to associate gender as a
binary, with two categories in which to box groups and individuals into—man/masculine and
woman/feminine, or (2) people tend to associate the word gender synonymously with women
only (Chant and Gutmann, 2002). The gender binary construction often ignores the realities of
gender intersections—that not all women share the same advantages and disadvantages, in
addition to the discrepancies among men (Lorber, 2012; Connell 2005). In order for Freedom
House to create programming that ultimately enhances gender equity, it is essential to develop a
clear and inclusive definition of gender. We propose that “gender” should really be understood
to include a plurality of identities and expressions, including masculinity, femininity,
transgender, and queer individuals to name a few. Additionally, gender must be recognized in its
permeations throughout a society, reflecting the social, political, and economic construction of
gendered institutions and practices throughout communities.

It is imperative that Freedom House give careful attention and consideration to examining
identities on the ground in regions, countries, and villages where it plans to implement gender
equity programs. On a global scale, most places in the world have strict social, cultural, and
traditional roles of gender in particular that affect one’s standing within a community and the
overall society. Freedom House is in a unique position to research and address identities within
a country or region before intervening with a program aimed at advancing gender equity. In
doing so, Freedom House will be better situated to either advocate for challenging or reinforcing
existing identities and/or gender roles. Without the awareness that comes from researching,
detecting, and cataloging how much a society truly genders in all spheres of private and public
life, one cannot adequately begin to challenge such institutions and roles. This will also allow
various concerns and experiences of subordinate groups to be addressed, as well as
acknowledging their shared experiences. It is important to always keep in mind, however, that
our identities are multifaceted and intertwined. Even though Freedom House can do the essential
work of challenging and/or reaffirming gender identities, there are various other obstacles associated with one’s identity to overcome since gender is convoluted with one’s social, economic, legal, and political position within a society.

Questions for Consideration:

- What kinds of identities are recognized and referred to in the country/region of intended programming?
- What identities in a society are valued more highly than others?
- What does gender encompass for Freedom House? Does it carry the same meaning from program to program?
- Will challenging and/or reinforcing part of an existing gender identity do more harm than good?
- How will programming move forward in places with identities not commonly understood by (Western) practitioners?

Clear and Comprehensive Gender Equity Discourse

As was discussed in the previous section, scholars, practitioners, and organizations have historically held the broad assumption that “gender” encapsulates only two identities—one that is distinctly masculine and the other distinctly feminine. Practitioners and agencies use different definitions of the word, and the word does not translate well in numerous cultural societies and languages. This makes it extremely difficult to maintain a clear and consistent dialogue on the subject (El-Bushra, 2000, pp. 56). Use of the term “gender” also tends to concentrate more on social and material factors, rather than symbolic and semiotic factors (Alsop, Fitzsimmons & Lennon, 2002, pp. 191). A person’s gender is subject to a great range of variability and influence, creating multiple masculinities and femininities (Peterson & Runya, 2010, pp. 60-61) that often fail to be recognized and incorporated in traditional definitions of the word “gender.”

Social norms on femininity and masculinity constrain all genders in ways that reject individual ingenuity and reinforce gender inequities (Sweetman, 2013, pp. 4). Discourse surrounding gender should acknowledge the perpetuation of the socially constructed identities on the part of both men and women; whether it is women raising young boys to be aggressors or men continuing to excuse violent acts as inherently masculine with such phrases as “boys will be boys” (Connell, 2005). Further, it is important to reiterate the intentional use of gender “equity” over “equality” in the context of this discussion. Gender equity is an issue of justice and fairness, allowing for the necessary resources, strategies, and accessibility for all genders to obtain equity. It is recognizing everyone’s equal rights according to their individual circumstances. Gender equity is a more feasible and constructive way of reaching an equitable playing field, for both men and women, than gender equality.

Due to the extremely complex relationships between and within genders and identities, as well as the varying ways these words are constructed and defined, it is crucial to develop a clear and
comprehensive gender equity discourse. The negative consequences of using inappropriate or inapplicable language to communicate the message of gender equity are endless, and may damage the progress that has already taken place. Examples of consequences include: (1) the exclusion of pertinent populations; (2) causing friction between individuals; and (3) an overall misunderstanding of program goals, among others. Freedom House’s work can only be effective if stakeholders have a clear understanding of the gender equity lexicon used in its analysis, advocacy, and action. It is unfeasible to establish one universal word or collection of words and definitions that are applicable in every circumstance. However, it is attainable for Freedom House to scrutinize the language it uses, within every context, to ensure the greatest level of understanding and consistency. It is expected that this field, language, and its many interpretations will change over time, requiring Freedom House to evolve its strategy for communicating its message of gender equity, human rights, and freedom.

Questions for Consideration:

- What do we (Freedom House) mean when we say words such as “gender,” “masculine,” “feminine,” etc.?
- Do those words exist within the population being worked with? If so, what do they mean within the context of that population, culture, region, religion, etc.?
- In what other ways does the target population express itself (beyond language) that impact how it understands gender identity relations and paradigms?
- If these words do not exist or translate well, what words can we use to express our work and ourselves?
- Are our words open and welcoming to multiple and varying genders and self-identities, specific to the environment we are in?
- If we use different words to articulate our message, adapting to the situation we are in, how can we keep our message of gender equity clear and consistent?
- How can our current lexicon of gender equity discourse evolve to accommodate interminable variations of gender identities and relations?

Targeted Mechanisms and Programming

Engaging Youth and Adolescents: Fostering Solidarity and Cooperation

Globally, men (often specific elite groups of men) control most of the power and resources available (Bond, 2010). The logical conclusion emerging from this reality is that men have ample power to lose as a collective in implementing calls for gender equity. A more optimistic perspective, however, holds that the global position of men and boys makes them the “gatekeepers of gender equality” (Connell, 2005, p. 1802). Rather than seeing men as the problem women must overcome, practitioners should see that men play a critical role in the solution (van der Gaag, 2011, pp 25). Men can change and self-reflection is a key to allowing for that change (Das and Singh, 2014). Finding strategic ways to make men and boys more
willing to open the gates to equity is thus a necessary step forward in the movement. Creating targeted programming for youth and adolescents that fosters solidarity and cooperation among boys and girls is a promising way of opening these gates.

How parents and society-at-large raise boys and girls matters, because it can contribute to or hinder the perpetuation of gender inequity. There is strong evidence, for instance, of the “intergenerational transmission of intimate partner violence,” which shows that parents’ educational attainment, fathers’ participation in domestic duties or childcare, and equitable decision-making in the childhood home can all reduce the likelihood of violence (Contreras, 2012, pp.2). Gender equity programs that target parents so that the parents might ultimately transmit more gender equitable practices to their children are positive steps forward. Although targeting parents is one way of indirectly reaching youth and adolescents, gender equity programs that directly work with youth and adolescents could produce more effective and sustainable results.

Freedom House’s commitment to advocacy and action coupled with the developing the “hearts and minds” of youth and adolescents, present ripe opportunities for enhancing gender equity. Using its deep commitment to the universal values that women’s and girls’ rights are human rights, Freedom House can influence and provide support to local programs and partners which make the moral argument of gender equity to youth and adolescents. Such support can occur by providing funding, training and resources to local partners, as well as through ongoing and comprehensive research into the conceptual framework of the Gender Equity Programming Cycle. In exercising these capacities, Freedom House’s role in furthering the moral argument of gender equity to youth and adolescents will primarily be that of a facilitator. Nevertheless, it is advantageous if Freedom House also operates with the intentions of creating and/or strengthening its own youth and gender equity programs at the local level, thereby taking on the roles of program creator and implementer.

In working with young girls, Freedom House can encourage them to reflect on traditional forms of masculinities, how those masculinities influence their lives, and how to avoid perpetuating or reinforcing them within their personal relationships and the broader society. Such a strategy is necessary in almost all patriarchal societies, including the United States, where The Ban Bossy Initiative seeks to address the discrepancy of “when a little boy asserts himself, he’s called a “leader.” Yet when a little girl does the same, she risks being branded “bossy.” Words like bossy send a message: do not raise your hand or speak up. By middle school, girls are less interested in leading than boys—a trend that continues into adulthood” (BanBossy, 2014).

Although working with both boys and girls is important, working specifically with young boys is an especially vital yet underrepresented initiative in the quest for achieving gender equity. Engaging boys at a young age is valuable because they are still shaping their identities on who
they are as boys, and who they will become as men. By targeting young boys, Freedom House can do important work in breaking cycles of violence against women. Breaking cycles of violence against women requires looking at how men are socialized at a young age, and then reforming male gender norms around gender-equitable ideals.

Freedom House can create programs that are venues for boys to explore their personal gender identities—whatever that may mean to them. Such venues create safe spaces, which allow boys to feel “cool” for caring about gender equity. Since Freedom House’s goal is to create transformative change that enhances human rights, it would be useful for Freedom House to consider institutionalizing its youth and adolescent programs by developing them into curricula that can be incorporated into schools. Importantly, it is never too early to begin the process of deconstructing traditional gender norms. Nursery and pre-schools, for example, which encourage boys and girls to explore toys and activities they are not usually exposed to (i.e., dolls for boys and toy cars for girls), set foundations of non-sexist language and attitudes (van der Gaag, 2011, pp. 43-44).

Ultimately, by engaging with youth and adolescents, Freedom House will transmit the ideals that gender equity is a “win-win” for everybody. Youth and adolescents, with their propensity for change and progress, can contribute to Freedom House’s transformative vision of improving its programming to enhance global gender equity. Foregoing opportunities to reach this pivotal group risks the creation of programming that only reaches the superficial levels of the deeply structural causes of gender inequity.

Questions for Consideration:

- Are the program facilitators cultivating gender equity in program participation? Does it create an environment where boys can easily dominate the conversation?
- Does the program lay the groundwork for effective collaboration between the participating boys and girls? How?
- Do girls feel comfortable leading group activities/projects?
- Does the language used in the program materials reinforce or take advantage of gender inequalities and stereotypes?
- Does the program encourage boys to focus on their personal reflections of power and privilege? Does it encourage them to create personal action plans for how they will change the ways they engage with the girls and women in their lives?
- Is there a space for boys to express different forms of masculinity and/or other gender identities?
- Is there a means for the programs/workshops/activities to be developed into curricula that can be incorporated into schools?
Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is an interactive process, with the purpose of tracking the progress of a project and assessing its overall impact on the target population and organizational goals. M&E is iterative, ongoing, and occurs throughout all phases of a project. What is learned from M&E should be used to help re-design project activities, develop better monitoring processes, implement again, and then re-evaluate again. Monitoring requires the consistent tracking of project implementation and outputs. Evaluation helps programs analyze the successes, failures, and effectiveness of projects, while highlighting areas of improvement. The “Questions for Consideration” at the end of each stage in the Gender Equity Programming Cycle are intended to initiate the development of gender sensitive indicators and to identify some of the key themes worth measuring and understanding. In general, there is an overall lack of commitment to strong systems of M&E in the field, making it even more necessary that Freedom House prioritize M&E within their work. By creating a thorough M&E plan, while still being flexible enough to adjust to environmental factors, Freedom House will not only learn how to improve gender equity strategies and programs, but gain the ability to demonstrate compelling results to a global audience.

Looking to the Future

The Gender Equity Programming Cycle should be seen as an initial step towards creating a more equitable international community. This cycle is a strategy with built-in flexibility and is open to adjustments based on the information generated via M&E feedback post-implementation. We are not proposing a solution that will quickly solve global gender inequities, but rather offering a format that can be adapted and used both top-down and bottom-up. It will allow programmers at Freedom House to deliver innovative strategies to organizations working on the ground and in turn allow the organizations to directly affect the cycle by delivering critical feedback. The questions posed for consideration are also mutable and are meant to be a jumping off point for further dialogue and discussion. Further discourse is necessary to highlight the binaries surrounding the term gender and address whether an entirely new term, or simply a different widely accepted definition, is required. While analyzing the term gender it is important to keep in mind that there are valuable communities that are currently left out of the mainstream “gender” discussions and frameworks, such as LGBTI and people with physical or mental disabilities. These communities are often oppressed by political and structural realities, and sometimes through physical violence. In keeping with our focus of advancing human rights and seeing humans as an end, it is pertinent that those groups are brought into the gender dialogue. Annual reformation of the cycle should eventually allow for this inclusion. With the use of the Gender Equity Programming Cycle, Freedom House is in an exciting position to inspire human rights activists and practitioners, transform lives, and enhance gender equity worldwide.
Justification of Chosen Themes

A movement toward realizing equal rights for women has firmly taken hold in just under 70 years. A remarkable transformation has occurred, from the birth of the United Nations (UN) Commission on The Status of Women in 1946 to the push for gender mainstreaming after the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Despite the successes of the movement, there remains a need for increased gender equity internationally. The following themes are explored in preparation of creating new gender equity programming with the goal of increasing gender equity worldwide. The following includes feminist and international development theoretical backgrounds, women’s human rights issues, and the need for greater integration of men and boys in addressing gender equity overall.

This research begins with a critical assessment of the most significant feminist theories influencing gender equity over the last few decades. This will be followed by examining the most influential development theories aimed at women, including Women and Development and Gender and Development. The first two thematic sections will provide a greater understanding of how the gender equality and equity movements have taken root, and what is still needed in order for gender equity to flourish today. Next, the primary debate surrounding women’s rights and empowerment and between the universality and relativity of human rights will be addressed. By understanding the primary arguments of both groups, we are able to discover the fallacies and truths of each and use this greater understanding to determine how to reconcile the differences. Analysis and examples of specific controversial cultural practices and at times human rights abuses, across the globe will highlight the methods that are effective in supporting women at the local level. International human rights treaties can at times translate into local action and support for women. Lastly, innovation and reformulation of local level programs will be supplemented with further involvement of men and boys toward the goal of global gender equity. Empowerment of women and achievement of gender equity will not be possible without the involvement of men who hold the highest positions of political, economic, social, and cultural power. Education, dialogue, social, and political action between men and women will push gender equity into a new framework and better address the existing injustices within this globalized and gendered world.

The Most Influential Feminist Theories Shaping Beliefs on Gender Equity

Feminist theories have been instrumental in shaping beliefs on gender equity through the last few decades. With the first wave of feminism taking place in the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States, rights were established that women exercise regularly today—the right to vote, to own property, to initiate a divorce, to go to college, and more. First wave feminists fought for women’s equal rights in political and social life. Second wave feminism, which started in the late 1960s, shifted its focus to the ways in which women were more disadvantaged than men, confronting sexual oppression of women, and political and legal deficiencies between men and women. Although feminist movements and groups were more fragmented during the second wave of feminism, united fronts were still established around issues like legalizing abortion and combating rape. What has been dubbed as third wave feminism began in the 1990s by younger feminists who grew up with feminism. They fought for gender equity as a norm and often align themselves in non-traditional ways of organizing than previous feminists (Lorber, 2012).
According to Judith Lorber, the goal of feminism as a political movement is “to make women and men more equal legally, socially, and culturally” (2012, pp.4). When speaking of gender inequality, usually one is refereeing to the disadvantages that women face in relation to men even though it is imperative to remember that men can be disadvantaged as well. In relation to gender inequality, feminism has stressed that it is not an individual matter or behavior to correct, but rather a deeply ingrained structural matter permeating and crosscutting society. Gender inequality is private, as well as public, political, social, legal, religious, and cultural.

The following section will examine dominant feminist theories that have contributed largely to gender equity. Although there are numerous theories that have been important in advancing gender equity through the decades, four theories have been chosen and justified for their contributions: social construction feminism, multiracial/multiethnic feminism, men’s feminism, and feminist ethics of care. The first three theories have also been categorized as gender rebellion feminisms, or how gender is socially constructed and maintained through practicing gender, and focusing on multiple sources of inequality. The shift from focusing on women to focusing on gender started in the 1980s and ultimately questioned the stability and necessity of the whole gendered social order (Lorber, 2012). The necessity of gender rebellion feminisms is important to the advancement of general equity because one must acknowledge the gendered differences plentiful throughout society before one can start to correct or change the gendered socialization and organization of society. Lastly, ethics of care feminism examines the gendered division of labor in the home—women primarily taking on most of the caretaking for children and elderly within families—and the devalued (socially and economically) nature of such care that women are primarily responsible for.

- **Social Construction Feminism**
  This theory addresses gendering practices (woman and femininity versus man and masculinity) that are prevalent throughout society, including those in cultural values, work organization, and division of labor in the family. The theory argues that gender differences are produced and maintained by socialization processes, including shaping aspects of one’s behavior, emotions, and relationships. The role of culture and language are essential to the process of gendering (Alsop, Fitzsimmons, and Lennon, 2002, pp. 79). Gender conformity and norms are reproduced and individuals and groups that deviate from the norm are then stigmatized. Most importantly, gender becomes institutionalized within society because all of the major social organizations are divided according to gender, and within the divisions, there are discrepancies in power, privilege, and economic resources. The institutionalization is prevalent in paid work, marriage and family, and legal and economic systems. The social construction of gendered differences provide for the disparities between men and women, producing gender inequality and resulting in women’s devalued status that permeates legal, political, social, and cultural spheres (Lorber, 2012; Alsop, Fitzsimmons, and Lennon, 2002).

  Social construction feminism’s value to gender equity is that when society recognizes the individual gendering that eventually feeds into the institutionalization of gender, it can begin to remedy the societal structures through “degendering”. According to Lorber (2012), degendering is the “recognition of the myriad ways that we do gender—and deliberately not continuing these practices” (pp. 225). Without the awareness of how much we truly do gender in all spheres of private and public life, we cannot begin to degender. Although remedying the gendered socialization and institutionalization will be an intensive and long-term process, it is necessary in order to achieve gender equity in the future.
• **Multiracial/Multiethnic Feminism**
  This theory encompasses the intersection of racial, ethnic, social class, and gender discrimination while placing an emphasis on the cultural devaluation of women of subordinate racial and ethnic groups by the dominant culture. While being developed during the second wave of feminism, this theory primarily challenged white feminists to address the differences among women—among African American women, Native American women, Latina women, and Asian American women. Moreover, this feminist theory stresses that one cannot look at one of the social status disadvantages alone, nor lump them together. Rather, multiracial/multiethnic feminism plays to the constructions of social locations that are oppressive because they are the result of multiple systems of domination where a member of the subordinate racial and ethnic group is caught in a “matrix of domination.” The matrix of domination showcases how gender is deeply intertwined with and cannot be separated from other social statuses that dictate advantage and disadvantage (Collins, 1998). A collaborative multiracial/multiethnic feminist movement would depend on the recognition of similar experiences of oppression, biographies, and differences within communities of women, and their men (Lorber, 2012).

  Multiracial/multiethnic feminism’s value to gender equity is that when society is challenged to address the differences among women and multiple systems of domination, especially for those in the subordinate racial and ethnic cultures, gender equity can be better addressed by both men and women. When the intersections of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and gender are examined in relation to and against one another, subordinate groups can address their various concerns, shared experiences, and differences. Subordinate groups can then begins to challenge the dominant culture in its power position. Multiracial/multiethnic feminism reminds one that even if gender equity is attainable, there are many other structural societal differences that affect one’s political, legal, social, and cultural standing within a society.

• **Men’s Feminism/Feminist Studies of Men**
  This theory aims to address hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal privilege—the dominance of economic and political power and cultural values by elite men. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the most powerful, wealthy, prestigious, and heterosexual men in a societal structure. It is also the pattern of practice that allows men’s dominance over women to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The theory scrutinizes masculinity in its different forms and addresses the many subordinate men throughout societies, including working-class men. Due to the range of men’s social positions, masculinity is better constructed as multiple masculinities, including dominant, subordinate, and intersected with the norms of social class, nationalities, religion, racial and ethnic status, and sexual orientations. This stratification of men means that they also benefit or lose differently from structures of masculinity. Men’s studies have called on the need to rework gender relations on a more equitable basis, given that the current gendered order oppresses and inhibits men as well as women. Constant through most forms of masculinities, however, is the marginalization and sexualization of women. Other valuable contributions of men’s feminism studies include research on the body, sexuality, violence, personality development, health, and family relationships (Lorber, 2012; Alsop, Fitzsimmons, and Lennon, 2002).

  Men’s feminism’s value to gender equity lies in recognizing the status of men who are
disadvantaged by race, ethnicity, social class, etc. Once acknowledging the differing statuses and disadvantages men face, women and men can better address hegemonic masculinity and work toward gender equity. The hope is that once men are able to recognize their position and privileges, they might share them with women and other subordinate men. Shifting hegemony in terms of both inter-gendered (men as a group are hegemonic compared to women) and intra-gendered (deviations of power, prestige, and wealth among men) ways is imperative to reaching gender equity. The challenge to men’s feminism in working toward gender equity, however, is the difficulty of convincing and finding hegemonic men who are willing to give up their dominance.

- **Feminist Ethics of Care**
  This theory was developed during the 1980s responding to the phenomenon of care. In particular, the theory addresses care as an ethical reflection in terms of informal care (especially for children and the elderly) being an undervalued, but necessary piece for the well-being of society. Traditional moral theories, principles, and practices are deficient to the degree they lack, ignore, trivialize, or demean values and virtues culturally associated with women, like caring. Women tend to disproportionately be the primary caregivers for children, the elderly, and the disabled more than men. A feminist ethics of care calls for the development of a more robust caring conception that includes men as well as women (Gilligan, 2011). In other words, a feminist ethics of care “calls for an approach to ethics in which women’s experience must be taken as seriously as men’s, and the morality of care is given significant standing” (Held, 1987, pp.111). Other sub-theories of feminist ethics of care hold that a woman is not in a position to truly care for someone if she is economically, socially, and/or psychologically forced to do so—most notably under male domination. So long as women do more than their fair share of caregiving work, both sexes will remain morally deprived (Mullet, 1998). The theory of feminist ethics of care has also argued that once caregiving responsibilities have been equalized between men and women, social cooperation, conceptions of reciprocity, a level playing field, and fair equality of opportunity can begin to emerge for both men and women (Kittay, 2011).

  Feminist ethics of care’s value to gender equity is that when societal and psychological constraints of care are acknowledged and addressed, discourse about the patriarchal construction of relationships can occur. If men and women were to have more balanced caregiving roles, both could benefit. Women could be less economically dependent upon men and could have the chance for opportunities outside of the home. Men could be more involved in child rearing and elder care, giving them new perspectives and experiences that carry across other spheres of society. Women can also be assured that when their care for another (whether a child or an elderly person) impedes their ability to care for and fend for themselves, they can depend on another (men) for sustenance and aid (Kittay, 2001). When the responsibility of caregiving is more balanced between men and women, perhaps then added societal value can be given to dependency work, whether privately or publicly (especially in terms of compensation). Great value to gender equity can occur when caregiving responsibilities are better shared between men and women.
Women and Development

The latter part of the 1970’s brought high hopes for a new Women and Development (WAD) movement. This movement sought to recognize the roles women already play in economic growth, moving away from the Women in Development (WID) strategy that neglected to examine what may be failing about existing development initiatives (Rathgeber, 1990, pp. 491), and emphasized that women must be integrated into economic development (Zwart, 1992, pp. 16). WAD was a neo-Marxist development approach, driven by Dependency Theory, and recognized the “relations between men and women” (Peet and Hartwick, 1999, pp. 183). In other words, WAD sought to identify the role women were already playing in the development of their societies (publically and privately), and the value their role has in maintaining those societies (Rathgeber, 1990, pp. 492-493). Ester Boserup, a central voice in the WAD movement, argued that encouraging women’s involvement in traditional practices of economic development took women away from their current and respected roles, ultimately weakening their valued position in society (Acosta-Belen and Bose, 1990, pp. 307). “…Development projects increased the demands on women without increasing access to resources or decision-making power and, in effect, worked against women’s interests” (CEDPA, 1996, pp. 11). Despite this recognition, weaknesses exist within this theory, making it insufficient to meet the needs for gender equity.

● Factors Influencing Status Beyond Gender

A major critique of the WID movement that extended to the WAD movement was its lack of consideration of how race, class, and other personal identities beyond gender also impacted women’s social status in society (Peet and Hartwick, 1999, pp. 186). Very little attention is given to gender within class, and women are often lumped into one group, without exploring the effect of these simultaneous identities (Rathgeber, 1990, pp. 493). Chandra Mohanty cautions that no woman’s experience is the same and any attempt to speak of women as a homogenous group with one viewpoint is misplaced. Specifically, Western women speaking on behalf of Third World women removes their agency and objectifies their experiences (Mohanty, 1991, pp. 70-71).

● A Broken Societal Structure and an Underestimation of the Power of Patriarchy

The WAD movement assumes that if international societies become more equitable, then women’s status in society will automatically improve. A much larger shift in gender relations is needed to reach such gender equity (Rathgeber, 1990, pp. 493). WAD operates within the parameters of existing and unequal societal structures, failing to challenge the confines of those structures (Peet and Hartwick, 1999, pp. 186). This sentiment expands beyond the individual, to reflect a larger argument that WAD initiatives fail to fully explore the actual origins of poverty and oppression within societies and beyond (Zwart, 1992, pp. 17). Further, language within the WAD movement, conforming to how “the European man” experiences growth and development (i.e. “labor” and “production”), largely ignores the experiences of women. This perpetuates patriarchal oppression of women in society (Peet and Hartwick, 1999, pp. 186).

● (Over) Emphasis on the Productive Sector

There is an overemphasis of the public/productive sector of societies in WAD, failing to afford adequate attention to women’s roles and time burdens in the private/reproductive sphere (Zwart, 1992, pp. 17). Through a WAD lens, there is “no economic value” to
reproductive work and all aspects of the private sphere fall beyond the responsibility of development work initiatives (Rathgeber, 1990, pp. 493). However, women’s work, whether in the formal labor market or in the private sector, is delicately interwoven. Dissecting this concurrence is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of women in developing societies (Tinker, 1990, pp. 42). Ann M. Oberhauser argues that there is a false contradiction between women’s only reproductive and private role in society, with men’s sole productive role in the public sphere. Patriarchy and male dominance extend to relationships in households, impacting women’s education and participation in the formal economy (1999, pp. 95-97). Women are constrained by filling the expected role as caregiver to children and aging adults. Oberhauser estimates that women lose over 11 productive working years fulfilling this responsibility, leaving them at a disadvantage to accessing the economic opportunities available to men (1999, pp.105-106).

Gender and Development

“Gender and Development” (GAD) arose during the 1980’s, marking a shift in how women’s roles in development should be perceived. There was a push toward understanding the construction of women’s place in society as a result of gendered relations, as opposed to their sex (CEDPA, 1996, pp. 11-12). GAD rejects sexual divisions of labor, acknowledges the diverse experiences of women worldwide, and advocates for women to be understood beyond a uniform group (Peet and Hartwick, 1999, pp. 187). Acknowledging and understanding the differences among women’s experiences illuminates the “connections and commonalities,” creating a more holistic approach to addressing inequalities worldwide (Mohanty, 2003, pp. 226). GAD welcomes men’s voices to gender equity discourse and advocates for the deconstruction of traditional gender roles (Zwart, 1992, pp. 18). The movement is in favor of changing patriarchal, racist, and capitalistic structures to create equality (rather than working within the existing structures), with the goal of creating a more comprehensive and effective platform for achieving gender equity (Peet and Hartwick, 1999, pp. 187-188). Though high hopes remain for GAD discourse, flaws persist, making it an inadequate theory for addressing global gender equity issues.

- Defining “Gender”

The word “gender” is often overused and misused, creating discrepancies and misunderstandings in its definition and application. A commitment to the use of this term requires “clarity and consistency” (Smyth, 2007, pp. 585). Practitioners and agencies use different definitions of the word, and the word does not translate well in numerous cultural societies and languages. This makes it extremely difficult to maintain a clear and consistent dialogue on the subject (El-Bushra, 2000, pp. 56). “Gender” is often used synonymously with “women,” making it difficult to incorporate other gender identities into the movement (Chant and Gutmann, 2002, pp. 271). Use of the term “gender” also tends to concentrate more on social and material factors, rather than symbolic and semiotic factors (Alsop, Fitzsimmons, and Lennon, 2002, pp. 191). Additionally, there is a broad assumption that there are only two gender identities, with men and women exclusively embodying masculine and feminine individualities, respectively. Expressions socially deemed as characteristics of masculinity or femininity differ greatly among sex, class, religion, culture, etc. A person’s gender is subject to a great range of variability and influence, creating multiple masculinities and femininities (Peterson and Runyan, 2010, pp. 60-61). The GAD movement places a
heavy emphasis on the differences between “gender” and “sex,” but these differences are increasingly questioned due to social constructions and individual interpretation of those identities (El-Bushra, 2000, pp. 57-59). Additionally,

‘Gender’ should be seen not as a politically correct ideology, but as an integral element in a wider search for a deep understanding of human behavior, which concerns itself with physical and emotional needs, perceptions, motivations, relationships and structures. Concepts such as ‘identity’, ‘agency’, and ‘power’ describe how human beings struggle to carve out acceptable lives for themselves in the constraints imposed by their historical positions, their social roles, and their personal attributes (El-Bushra, 2000, pp. 61).

- **Women’s Economic Empowerment**
  Increasing access to and participation in global economic activities drives many GAD initiatives. As a result, efforts to increase women’s value in society are dominated by economic empowerment programs, such as micro financing. Addressing women’s economic empowerment is not a “catch all” approach to creating gender equity (El-Bushra, 2000, pp. 56). Increasing economic power for women can also create a “backlash” toward women within the household and at the community level. For example, some men feel disempowered by their wives and women in the community who are economically more successful than them. Their role as “household breadwinner” is removed, challenging their personal identity and role in the family (Dover, 2014, pp. 92). These feelings of disempowerment often manifests in forms of violence against women (Momsen, 2001, pp. 52). GAD assumes a household where women possess personal autonomy, and fails to explore the “intra-household relationships” that influence one’s agency outside of the home (Lansky, 2000, pp. 499). The complex gender relations that define men and women’s status in society cannot be reconciled by focusing on one single aspect of women’s oppression.

- **Women as a Homogenous Group**
  Despite GAD’s intention to recognize the diversity of women, its critics maintain that the movement has failed to afford a voice to women of the developing world (Peet and Hartwick, 1999, pp. 188). GAD dialogue continues to focus on women as one group, rather than acknowledging the many differences that exist among them. Global statistics are often used to describe women’s status, when women’s individual experiences cannot be equated in that way, diluting crucial pieces of the movement (El-Bushra, 2000, pp. 56-57). Subordination takes many forms, is experienced differently by women all over the world, and changes over time. Therefore, there is no possible way to develop an all-encompassing feminist or development theory that will once and for all resolve the gender equity gap. A modern response to addressing gender inequities requires self-reflection and the intent to understand the experiences and needs of all women (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1993, pp. 113-114).

- **Male Involvement**
  Although GAD initiatives strive to involve men into programming efforts, many have failed to reach this goal (Chant and Gutmann, 2002, pp. 269). Chant and Gutmann argue that development programs will fail to succeed without giving appropriate consideration to men, and that dissecting traditional gender roles requires an intentional dialogue with men (2002, pp. 271). However, many practitioners remain concerned that involving men in gender
equity work will lead to the fading of women’s participation and priorities (Chant and Gutmann, 2002, pp. 279), as well as a loss in resources and funding that should be focused on elevating women (Lansky, 2001, pp. 87). Further, it remains imperative to allow for “women only” venues in certain cultural contexts. For example, this is the case where women are barred from attending meetings with men or in communities where women feel more comfortable taking risks and trying new things in the company of other women (Jaquette and Staudt, 2006, pp. 31). However, including men in gender equity discourse is crucial to ultimately achieving that goal, a subject for critical review later in this literature review.

Shift toward “Gender Equality”

Julian Rivers argues for a liberal view of “gender equality” terminology, which carries heavy ethical implications for human action. She states, “this liberal conception is rooted in the fundamental moral identity of all human beings, the moral irrelevance of fixed distinguishing personal characteristics, and the equal human capacity to benefit from a unified scheme of public general rights and duties” (2007, pp. 48). Major criticisms of the WID, WAD, and GAD movements lead to a broader use of the term “gender equality” as an all-encompassing approach to achieving equal status for women. By using a broader, “gender equality” lens, there is an intention to bring about equality beyond the realm of formal “development” efforts, to include social institutions, identity, power, relationships, and hegemonic masculinity (El-Bushra, 2000, pp. 61). Further, a “gender equality” framework simplifies the issue on a “non-discrimination” platform, allowing for more ease with integrating women’s rights into legislation (Lansky, 2001, pp. 100). “Gender mainstreaming”, a dominant strategy that took hold during the GAD movement, remains prevalent in “gender equality” discourse. “Gender mainstreaming” efforts seek to integrate gender equality initiatives into every aspect of development work (and beyond), ultimately transforming women’s position in society (Mukhopadhyay, 2003, pp. 45). Many remain hopeful for the success of gender mainstreaming, but success will require a deeper manifestation of gender-sensitive language and action within development and donor agencies at every level (Jaquette and Staudt, 2006, pp. 38). Despite the many successes “gender equality” discourse has achieved, gaps remain.

- **Equality and the Law**
  Although the law has used “gender equality” discourse to transform the lives of women in many countries, gaps remain and the law reflects the interests of society, and not necessarily what is just (Lansky, 2001, pp. 94). Equality under the law (i.e. “non-discrimination on the grounds of sex”) does not always translate into something tangible, and the ability of women’s rights to be actualized at the local and international levels differs tremendously (Lansky, 2001, pp. 99-100). This is especially the case in societies where tribal and customary laws hold precedent over state legislation. In many societies, women are coerced into refusing the legal support afforded to them, in favor of conforming to social traditions (Williams, 2011, pp. 68-69). It is argued that there is the need for more radical change in the “gender equality” framework that would better dissect the interpersonal relations and values that dictate the legal demands of society (Lansky, 2001, pp. 99-100).

- **The Private Sphere**
  Just like the development theories before it, “gender equality” discourse has failed to
penetrate the uneven power dynamics of the household and private sphere (Nousiainen, Holli, Kantola, Saari and Hart, 2013, pp. 44). Despite “gender equality” discourse, the expectation of women to fulfill unpaid care, such as caring for the disabled and elderly, remains. This expectation limits women’s ability to participate equally in the public sector, impedes on their human rights and reinforces men’s position outside of the home (Hendra, Fitzgerald and Seymour, 2013, pp. 113-114).

- **“Equality” as “Sameness”**
  
  Gender equality is often measured by male standards, when attempting to realize women’s agency, power, and equal access to rights (Nousiainen, Holli, Kantola, et al, 2013, pp. 44). The act of stacking men and women against one another other, as if they are two distinctly different entities, fails to recognize the unique identities and relationships that define power and position between individuals. This “non-discrimination approach” assumes equal access to the public sphere, and pressures women to conform to male norms as if male norms are what is “best” (Lansky, 2001, pp. 100-101). Catharine MacKinnon emphasizes this point by stating,

  Concealed is the substantive way in which man has become the measure of all things. Under the sameness rubric, women are measured according to correspondence with man, their equality judged by proximity to his measure. Under the difference rubric, women are measured according to their lack of correspondence from man, their womanhood judged by their distance from his measure (1993, pp. 185).

This position reinforces patriarchal structures by requiring women to conform to male expectations and norms (Nousiainen, Holli, Kantola, et al, 2013, pp. 50). The human rights of women should be encapsulated within the broader framework of the rights and freedoms that should be available to all humans. Amartya Sen argues that gender equality is an issue of “freedom,” and women have access to fewer “capabilities” than men. He argues that addressing this lack of freedom and capability is of much greater importance than discussing women’s access to goods (Sen, 1992, pp. 124-125). Additionally, Martha Nussbaum states that women are often treated as a means to someone else’s end, rather than having the freedom to lead their own dignified life (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 5-6).

- **The “Capabilities Approach”**
  
  Amartya Sen is well known for developing an ethical theory of justice, entitled the “Capabilities Approach.” The Capabilities Approach focuses on the human life, and explores how well an individual is able to fulfill the aspects of their life that he or she values. The level of “capability” a person has in doing the things that he or she values is a way of measuring the level of freedom and opportunity a person has to choose and take action on (Sen, 2009, pp. 231-232). Nussbaum builds upon Sen’s Capabilities Approach, to include a list of ten “central capabilities” that are required to live a life dignified as human (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 71-72). These capabilities are interdependent, and include “life, bodily integrity, and practical reason” (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 78-79). Sen and Nussbaum’s exploration of the Capabilities Approach step away from comparing men and women as a means of understanding gender equality, and rather focuses on how humans as individuals can become
whole and equal (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 86). The theory emphasizes the freedom to choose and an equal right to being understood and valued as an end (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 18). Lansky quotes Nussbaum as stating that her analyses “are not really about women at all but about human beings and about women seen as fully human” (2001, pp. 111). Human rights discourse is largely in line with the Capabilities Approach, with both philosophies grounded largely on the premise that humans are afforded some rights by the very nature of being human, and that there is an expectation that society must honor those entitlements (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 62). The Capabilities Approach exhibits potential for connecting the moral responsibility for actualizing the human rights of women, while recognizing each woman as a distinct individual.

**Women’s Rights as Human Rights**

Sen states, “Proclamations of human rights, even though stated in the form of recognizing the existence of things that are called human rights, are really strong ethical pronouncements as to what should be done” (Sen, 2009, pp. 357). Nussbaum identifies human rights as “combined capabilities,” to clarify that legislated “rights” do not always guarantee rights at the ground level. Human rights are only possible if people have a means to exercise them (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 98). The universalist human rights paradigm proposes that every person across the globe is guaranteed equal protection of basic unalienable rights. The incorporation of women and gender into the international (universal) legal human rights framework came long after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was established in 1948. Women were underrepresented in human rights research until the late 1980s (Friedman, 1995, pp. 25). The focus of the women’s rights as human rights movement concentrated on framing the rights of women as the rights of half of humanity in order to gain greater international recognition (Friedman, 1995, pp. 22). The Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), one of the most ratified international human rights conventions in the world, played a crucial role in framing women’s rights as human rights throughout the 1990’s (Peterson and Runyan, 2010, pp. 18). In 1993, the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action (VDPA) published the first extensive section dedicated to women’s rights as human rights (Fraser, 2002, pp. 57). The VDPA states, “the World Conference on Human Rights urges the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and that this be a priority for Governments and for the United Nations,” (1993). A key component of the women’s rights movement is to move away from the male voice used throughout many international legal documents. Just as it was criticized in the GAD movement, men should not be a measurable indicator for the extension of women’s rights (Hevener-Kaufman & Lindquist, 1995, pp. 121). Since men are the primary legal interpreters, inclusion of female-specific gendered language and protections should be added to international, state, and local laws (Hevener-Kaufman & Lindquist, 1995, pp. 122).

However, Sen cautions humanity on narrowly defining human rights within the confines of legislation. Other aspects of life, such as advocacy and education can be effective vehicles for actualizing human rights and freedoms. Approaching human rights from an ethical, as opposed to a legislative approach, often produces more robust and compelling results (Sen, 2009, pp. 365-366). According to Sen, global “public reasoning” plays a critical role in promoting human rights and exploring conflicting definitions of human rights. This type of dialogue requires the consideration and ethical scrutiny of alternative parameters of how human rights are interpreted (Sen, 2012, pp. 99-100). In opposition to the universalist human rights paradigm, cultural relativism is based on two core assumptions of the definition of culture and its relation to the
maintenance of traditional community activities and beliefs. The first definition states that, “culture is defined as the art of developing intellectual and moral faculties, especially by education, acquaintance with the fine arts, humanities, and sciences” (Afkhami, 2002, pp. 239). The second definition describes culture as, “the customary beliefs, social, forms, and material traits of racial, religious, or social groups” (Afkhami, 2002, pp. 239). The second definition is that which many relativists use as a means to deny gendered human rights framework and oppose legislation that mandates women’s rights. Western supporters of cultural relativism are namely anthropologists and sociologists, however many other fields may identify as supporters as well. The popular argument for “preservation of cultural rights” among Western scholars and practitioners is based upon a skewed view of freedom of choice to practice any “cultural” activities without foreign intervention and judgment (Afkhami, 2002, pp. 240).

Conflicting perspectives between the respect of traditional culture and embracing modern universal rights highlights the tensions that exist between individual autonomy, group solidarity, and individual rights and duties (Ewelukwa, 2006, pp. 157). However, Nussbaum argues that the cultural relativist argument holds no ground in the twenty-first century, where the media and other cultural ideals influence virtually all societies. Cultural relativism is often mistaken as an attempt to be respectful to different cultures, but accommodating every cultural difference often results in higher levels of intolerance (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 48-49). Nussbaum emphasizes, “...indeed, universal norms are actually required if we are to protect diversity, pluralism, and freedom, treating each human being as an agent and an end” (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 106). The twenty-first century has also increased globalized pressure from Western states onto developing nations, compelling them to formally endorse and create laws that defend universality of human rights. Although these states may legally support gender equality and human rights, the state’s society and individuals often continue to uphold customary laws in place of state law (Donnelly, 2007, pp. 291-292).

Women’s Human Rights Abuses within Cultural Context

Physical Anatomy

- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

There have been many names given to the traditional practice that involves the cutting of female genitals, but the collective name most commonly associated with the practice is FGM (Adjetey, F.N., 2005, pp. 167). FGM, also known as female genital cutting, is dangerous to the physical and emotional health of women in practicing areas. FGM is a global issue and although it is practiced most notably throughout Africa and parts of the Middle East, it is also practiced among immigrant communities within Europe, Canada, Australia, and the United States even though most of these states have formally outlawed the procedure (Mitchum, 2013, pp. 590). Each year two million girls are subjected to FGM practices (Burn, 2000, pp. 59). There are three different types of FGMs performed, including clitoridectomy, excision, and infibulation. All are dangerous to the health of the woman, however, infibulation is considered the most dangerous of the three styles. Infibulation includes the removal of the clitoris, the inner and the outer labia, and fusion of the remaining raw surfaces to create a “hood of skin” covering the urethra and leaving only a small opening for both urine and menstrual blood to pass through. Clitoridectomy is the partial or full removal of the clitoris, while excision is the full removal of the clitoris and the inner labia. Approximately 85 percent of women that undergo FGM fall within the clitoridectomy and excision types (Toubia, 1995, pp. 227).
The defense of FGM practice is based on various societal, biological, religious, and psychological beliefs. It is defended as a rite of passage of young girls into adulthood by removing the “masculine” clitoris and is said to preserve a woman’s purity by creating a visible barrier against sexual intercourse as well as lowering her sexual drive (Mitchum, 2013, pp. 594). Some cultures also believe that the clitoris is harmful to babies during childbirth and to males during intercourse. In Uganda, women that do not undergo FGM become unmarriageable, ostracized, and denied of any societal position (Mitchum, 2013, pp. 594-595). Physical health complications resulting from FGM include but are not limited to excessive blood loss, infection (external and internal), and leakage of feces and urine (Burn, 2000, pp. 60). In addition, the loss of sexual gratification due to the removal of the clitoris is cause for feelings of permanent frustration and dissatisfaction among many women.

- **FGM in Kenya**
  - **Strategy** – Women pledge they will not practice FGM on their daughters and men will not allow this to impact marriageability. A trusted community member also facilitates dialogue on FGM health education
  - **Results** – There has been a decrease in FGM practices and partial elimination of the fear of marriageability. Unsuccessful practices to reduce FGM have included compensation and top-down legislation (IDLO, 2013).

- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**
  GBV has commonly been defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in private or public life” (Agosin, 2001, pp. 88). CEDAW defines GBV as, “… a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on the basis of equality with men” (CEDAW, 1992). Subcategories of GBV include rape, battery, domestic violence, forced abortion, slavery, and more. In order to reduce incidents of GBV, education targeting adolescents, women, and men should be implemented at the state and local levels (World Bank, 2011, pp. 311). However, it is important to note that many victims of GBV, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence are men and boys. Female violence towards males tends to be almost as prevalent as male violence against females in some countries, although males tend to be more severely violent (i.e., violence resulting in hospitalization, psychological trauma, murder, etc.) (Holtzworth-Munroe, 2005). Moreover, in conflict situations, men, women, boys, and girls are all victims of GBV, including sexual violence, forced conscription, and sex-selective massacre. Whether in conflict situations or peaceful times, both women and men can be perpetrators and victims of GBV (Carpenter, 2006).

GBV is the result of and perpetuated by social, cultural, and traditional environments. Violence is most commonly employed to control the behavior of another, but is also used in retribution or to promote or defend a self-image. The control of one person over another through violence can be used to influence current or future behavior, or more generally to assert dominance in a family (as many men have been socialized to do through patriarchal systems). Women often have a dependence on men—including financial—that hinders them from fleeing a violent home or partner (Felson and Messner, 2000). In some cultures, physical abuse is an acceptable tenant of marriage, and a normative degree of
beatings is not outside of a husband's prerogative. In other many societies, women and men are less inclined to report abuse out of shame, reluctance to incriminate family members, or fear of retaliation. In other cultures, honor punishments are a structural part of communities and tribes and an acceptable avenue to settle familial or neighborly disputes (Fischbach and Herbert, 1997). As a global human rights issue affecting men and women, GBV is prevalent throughout the world in almost every region.

- **Domestic violence in Ethiopia and Eritrea**
  Within Ethiopia and Eritrea, 14 million or 81 percent of women between ages 15-49 believe that beatings by a husband to a wife are justifiable if the wife burns the food, disagrees with the husband, or refuses sex (World Bank, 2011, pp. 367).

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**Legal Rights**

- **Widows’ Rights and Inheritance**
  Many states worldwide have enacted laws to protect a woman’s right to inheritance, particularly that of widows. However, within many of these states customary law prevails which prevents women from inheriting their legally protected share. Gendered deprivation of property and legal rights within a family takes place primarily within Sub-Saharan Africa, wherein social and legal structures are a result of traditional cultures, the colonial experience, and the post-colonial socio-economic and political frameworks (Ewelukwa, 2006, pp. 156). For example, in Rwanda customary law prevents women from buying and selling property without their husbands’ approval (Mertus, 1995, pp. 142). Furthermore, Ugandan laws protect women’s inheritance via written wills, but few are educated on the process of creating wills and therefore do not draft one. (Oguli-Oumo, 2005, pp. 248).

  In addition to Sub-Saharan Africa, many nations in the Middle East do not adequately protect a woman’s share of inheritance, since under Islamic Sharia law women are only entitled to half of the inheritance of a male in the same capacity (Mayer, 1995, pp. 177). In Iran for example, a husband is entitled to a share of his wife’s estate but a wife is excluded from inheriting any of his land (COHRE, 2006). The use of pre-colonial cultures and traditions, as well as religious reasons, as a blanket approach to defend the deprivation of women’s rights in Africa and the Middle East is unrealistic and naive (Ewelukwa, 2006, pp. 156). The common distrust of women with money and property, as well as arguments to keep family property within the immediate family, have resulted from paternalistic attitudes and patrilineal communities. Women are viewed as helpless members of society who need to be protected by male figures; for her “protection,” a late husband’s rights and property are easily transferred to a living male family member (Ewelukwa, 2006, pp. 171). Factors such as early marriage, bride price (dowry), polygamy, religion, and social norms are closely tied to women’s limited access to acquiring property and equal shares of inheritance (Oguli-Oumo, 2005). In this way, a woman is viewed as property to be acquired by a family, rather than as a human being, and is therefore moved around easily and carelessly with little regard to her own wishes and livelihood (Magoke-Mhoja, 2005, pp. 259). Due to the gendered division of resources, women of the global South have little access to resources that would make their individual and familial lives easier and are also treated as resources themselves via structural abuse by their community (Runyan & Peterson, 2014, pp. 231).

- **Widows’ rights and inheritance in Namibia**

  **Strategy:** Increase the number of women as traditional leaders and members of city council in order to strengthen their position in the community. By
strengthening their position and visibility in the community, women are better positioned to correct for the lack of rights afforded to all women (including widows).

Results - Promotion of women’s empowerment and appointment of women to council by the community’s Chief is key to success (IDLO, 2013).

- Son Preference
  Gender preference is executed via selective abortion, technological advancements to predetermine sex, or female infanticide. Countries where inheritance is patrilineal and male children are the sole bearers of the family name are primary centers for such practices. Traditional philosophies and certain religions prize male over female children as the breadwinners and backbone of their family unit. China, India, and South Korea constitute the highest rates of “son preference” and it is estimated that there are approximately 100 million missing women from the global population due to this practice (Agosin, 2001, pp. 139). A recent study from India indicates that only two percent of families celebrate the birth of a girl (van der Gaag, 2011, pp. 34). Qualitative studies facilitated to measure levels of son preference point to two primary reasons associated with the sex preference. First, the importance of sons to continue the family line and name, and second, sons are expected to provide economic and physical support of their parents in old age (Priya et al., 2012, pp. 66).

  ○ Son preference in China
    Strategy – The Care for Girls program offers preferential low interest loans and educational scholarships to families without sons as well as various support groups, and health services for women of a reproductive age. The program also supports educational campaigns against son preference and sex-selective abortions, as well as creates advocacy groups that educate citizens on parenthood and reproductive health (Li, 2007, Appendix pp. 3).
    Results - “This project has efficiently reduced sex ratio at birth levels in 24 counties, declining from 133.8 in 2000 to 119.6 in 2005” (Li, 2007, pp. 10).

Political and Democratic Participation

- Women in Government (Quotas)
  As of 2009, women represent a mere 17 percent of lower or single houses of national parliaments worldwide (World Bank, 2011, pp. 84). The ratio of likelihood for a female to win a seat in parliament is approximately 0.87 to 1, with 1 being the male constant (World Bank, 2011, pp. 84). As of 2012, 90 countries have established quotas to ensure women’s representation within national and local governments. These quota systems range from flexible to fixed in their numbers and format for implementation (World Bank, 2011, pp. 84). Of the nations who implement quota systems, 16 specifically reserve parliamentary seats. Quota programs that pave the legal pathway for women’s involvement in government should be coupled with programs to ensure that these women are qualified and able to assert their voice (Gomez, 2006).

  ○ Rwanda
    Between 1995 and 2009, the World Bank Development Report 2012 notes that Rwanda increased their female political representation from 17 percent to 56 percent (World Bank, 2011, pp. 84).

  ○ Mongolia
After electoral reform prior to the 2012 election, women were mandated to have proportional representation wherein 20 percent of the electoral candidates contesting seats must be women. A record 32 percent of women candidates contested for seats and now a record 12 percent of the parliament seats belong to women (True, Niner, Parashar, & George, 2012, pp. 17). Mongolia demonstrates how fast changes can occur by using quota systems, which allow the voices once absent to be heard. Distrust among the voters of previous male dominated leadership that had turned corrupt may have caused this change in voting toward higher than expected female representation (True et al., 2012, pp. 17). It is advisable for new women in parliament to create a women’s caucus and communicate with other women leaders across the globe in order to form an open dialogue and increase visibility.

● **Voting**

Women’s participation in political processes promise to provide a wider and representative voice of a democratic nation and its people. The exclusion of women from the political arena has stemmed from a lack of financial support and feelings of confidence based on long-term societal views of women’s inferiority with regards to leadership (NDI, 2013). Women’s disproportionate familial obligations as well as community pressure and lack of education keeps women along the periphery of decision making which in turn directly affects their lives and maintains this cyclical passage of gender discriminatory values (NDI, 2013). Women’s voting discrimination is a global women’s issue, and particularly occurs throughout the Asia Pacific region.

**Engaging Men and Boys in the Dialogue on Gender Equality**

As previously mentioned, scholars, practitioners, and agencies have historically held the broad assumption that “gender” encapsulates only two identities—one that is distinctly masculine and the other distinctly feminine. The consideration of gender as two inherently opposed phenomena occurs at the expense of a deeper understanding of human behavior, which considers individuals’ various physical and emotional needs, perceptions, motivations, and relationships (Sweetman, 2013). Social norms on femininity and masculinity constrain both sexes in ways that reject individual ingenuity and reinforce gender inequality (Sweetman, 2013, pp. 4). There is increasing recognition however, that men and women are defined by more than their stereotypical masculine and feminine identities, and instead, are reflections of multiple identities in which race, class, religion, and gender intersect (Connell, 2005).

● **The Gender Binary**

According to R.W. Connell—a preeminent scholar on gender equality, men, and masculinity—the widespread belief that men cannot change their ways and that “boys will be boys,” implying that rape, war, sexism, domestic violence, aggression, and self-centeredness are natural to men, does a disservice to the gender equality dialogue (Connell, 2005, pp. 1811). In line with this argument, Bonnie Honig argues that there are brutal men and women everywhere, and their brutality cannot necessarily be attributed to one facet of their identity (1999, pp. 36). Although scholarship on the subject is lacking, there is increasing attention for instance, to the roles women play as instigators and perpetrators of violence (Moser and Clark, 2001). The actions of women during the Rwandan genocide (Sharlach, 1999) and the
Darfur crisis (Mohammed, 2007) are among the most frequently cited. Despite evidence disproving the clear-cut boundaries between the behaviors of men and women, the binary opposition between masculinity and femininity remains pertinent in discussions on gender equity.

• **The Global Patriarchy**
  Feminists have often complained of the global “patriarchal dividend” in reference to the advantages that all men have in a society that favors maleness or masculinity (Connell, 2005, pp. 1808). Globally, men (often specific groups of privileged men) control most of the power and resources (Bond, 2010). Men therefore have the most to lose as a collectivity in implementing claims for gender equity. A more optimistic perspective holds that the global position of men and boys makes them the “gatekeepers of gender equality” (Connell, 2005, pp. 1802). Finding strategic ways to make men willing to open the gates to equity is thus a necessary step forward in the movement.

• **Recognizing the Disempowered Male**
  Calls to recognize the multifaceted nature of women and their identities are being followed with equally strident calls to recognize the multifaceted nature of men (Lorber, 2012). R.W. Connell argues that the paradigm of placing men and women into collective and diametrically opposed groups discounts the reality that not all women share the same disadvantages and not all men share the same advantages. As explained by Connell, class, race, national, regional, and generational differences crosscut the category “men,” spreading the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men. There are many situations where groups of men may see their interest as more closely aligned with the women in their communities than with other men (2005, pp. 1809).

  Few men are able to embody hegemonic masculinity and its expectations of men as the elite leaders of society (Connell, 1987; Sweetman, 2013). Discounting disempowered men creates backlash, resulting in violence against women and practices that disempower women. Accordingly, many scholars see a need to focus more on the male side of gender analysis in order to understand how men’s lives are constrained by gender norms relating to masculinity (Connell, 1987; Lwambo, 2013). Although norms on masculinity differ across cultures, the majority stress men’s role as “community leaders, household heads, and primary providers, in a globalized world in which traditional ideas of gender relations have now blended with Western-influenced globalized values” (Sweetman, 2013, pp. 4).

**Incentives for Men to Support Gender Equity**
  Gender equity is only possible if boys and men participate in making a change. Rather than seeing men as the problem, men play a critical role in the “solution” (van der Gaag, 2011, pp. 25). Arguments for why men should support gender equity—both principled and pragmatic—are numerous and compelling. The aforementioned discussion of the global patriarchy, and the advantages it places upon some men, provides a general context into why some men do not support equity. Before engaging in a discussion on what incentivizes men to support women’s equity, however, it is necessary to briefly outline more concrete reasons for non-support from men. Øystein Holter describes a “third/third/third pattern” of male support for
equity in which about one-third of men support change towards gender equity, about one-third oppose it, and one-third are undecided or intermediate (1997, pp. 131–34). Men who directly support change towards gender equity usually do so, because it is in line with their political and ethical principles. On the other hand, men who completely oppose gender equity typically hold an ideological defense of male supremacy. Those who are intermediate may support equity in principle, but they sustain men’s dominance in practice due to the pressures placed upon them by societal constructions of masculinity. Holter’s theory suggests that the majority of men (approximately two-thirds)—those who support gender equity and those who are intermediate—could be potential allies and/or activists in the struggle for global gender equity.

**Moral Arguments**

Undergirding many moral arguments on why men should support gender equity are references to the active relationships men have with women (Holter, 1997; Walby, 1997; Connell, 2002), and on how these relationships should be exploited to encourage men to be responsible husbands and fathers (Connell, 2005; Sweetman, 2013). In line with the gender binary paradigm, leadership and organization specialists have argued that the security of societies could be improved if men adopted more “feminine” styles of non-violent negotiation and conflict resolution (Appelbaum et al., 2003). A different school of thought on morality and gender takes a more male-centered approach by arguing for general changes in violent masculinities for the sake of men’s overall well-being. James Harrison (1978) famously argued that men should avoid the toxic effects of society-imposed masculinities, which led to a growing differential in life expectancy between men and women in the 20th century. Harrison’s study put men more at risk of premature death, occupational injury, higher levels of drug abuse, and a relative unwillingness to seek medical help when it is needed.

**Economic Arguments**

The typical economic arguments emerging from the WID movement and permeating in the GAD movement advocated that since women make up 50 percent of the population, they should be included in the workforce equally as a means of general societal development with regard to poverty and underemployment (Boserup, 1970; Benería and Sen, 1981). A revamped version of this earlier argument holds that social and economic pressures on men to compete in the workplace puts extra stress on them, and men should therefore advocate sharing workplace burdens with women, especially in the global South. Today, many of these economic arguments are refuted by the increasing male backlash in marital relationships that has come from the “economic development” of women (Kabeer, 1998; Silberschmidt, 2001). The unplanned, negative impact of male backlash against economically empowered women with increased self-esteem results from gender norms that “are thrown into crisis by economic realities shifting and challenging the roles of women and men in marriage and the family” (Sweetman, 2013, pp. 5).

**Arguments for Separation**

As mentioned in the earlier discussion on GAD, many practitioners remain concerned that involving men too much in gender equity work will come at the expense of women’s participation, priorities, and resources (Chant and Gutmann, 2002; Lansky, 2001). Such practitioners see gender relations through a zero-sum lens, in which women’s advancement
inevitably comes as a result of the disempowerment of men (Farrell, 1993; Sommers, 2000). Similarly, some practitioners question the legitimacy men bring to the gender equity struggle, because they view men as the “perpetrators” that women must overcome. Others fear male representation of female voices, which might bring immediate results in the short-term, but will be problematic in the long-term. These advocates generally want male support for gender equity, but they believe this support should be complementary to the existing gender equity structures, and not necessarily incorporated as a primary pillar of these structures. This thought paradigm has manifested in the policy realm as some policymakers have restructured gender equity policies in the form of parallel but segregated policies for women and men (Connell, 2005, pp. 1806).

**How to Incorporate Men**

Although some practitioners believe men should be separate, background participants in gender equity efforts, there is increasing consensus on the need for men and women to create integrated and mutually beneficial partnerships for long-term, transformative change. The opportunities for integration and collaboration include advocacy, organizing and campaigning, deconstructing violent masculinities, and creating educational programs for young men and boys. Specifically, the 2011 Plan International report on the “State of the World’s Girls” recommends a stronger focus on systems of education (e.g. starting the conversation at preschool age, redeveloping curriculum to promote non-traditional gender roles), increased campaigns for involving men and boys in gender equity dialogue, and additional legislation that supports gender equity initiatives (van der Gaag, 2011, pp. 140).

Today, some of the most prevalent methods being used to integrate men into efforts for gender equity involve moving away from expectations of violent masculinities. Some proponents of the “separation” school of thought believe that women should not work with violent men, because it encourages women to stay with their abusers. Others, like Desiree Lwambo (2013), believe that current approaches to supporting the female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence need to be complemented by other activities aimed at breaking cycles of violence. Breaking these cycles requires looking at how men are socialized, and then reforming male gender norms “around ideals of non-violence that build a sense of male pride and dignity based on progressive, gender-equitable ideals” (Sweetman, 2013, pp. 5).

**Organization and Program Examples**

- **Promundo: Addressing Young Men and Boys**: One of the most prominent organizations working internationally to engage men and boys to promote gender equality and end violence against women is Promundo. Promundo conducts frequent studies on the ways in which parents raise boys contributes to or hinders the perpetuation of gender inequality. In a recent analysis on data from their International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), Promundo found strong correlations to support claims of the “intergenerational transmission of intimate partner violence” (Contreras, 2012, pp. 2). According to their survey, parents’ educational attainment, fathers’ participation in domestic duties or childcare, and equitable decision-making in the childhood home can all reduce the likelihood of violence. The study finds that comprehensive family and community violence prevention approaches that combine gender equality messages, engage mothers and fathers, and seek to reduce the multiple stresses that low-income families with children often face are pertinent to reducing cycles of violence. Promundo’s work is
widespread and the organization is well known for collaborating with small organizations, as well as internationally (i.e., The World Bank) on initiatives to promote gender equality. Since 1997, Promundo has demonstrated the effectiveness of working with men and encouraged practitioners to incorporate men and boys into gender equity work (Promundo, 2014).

- **Addressing Violence Against Women**
  
  There are numerous grassroots examples of organizations utilizing partnerships between men and women for gender equality purposes within the realm of violence against women initiatives. To address the friction created in marital relationships by the economic empowerment of women, a pilot project in Rwanda linked to CARE-Rwanda’s Village Savings and Loan program, works with men to get them to deliberately question their ideas about successful manhood and power dynamics between them and their wives (Slegh et al., 2013). Similarly, the Construction of Violence-Free Masculinities (CJMT) project in Peru (Mitchell, 2013), and the Responsible Men Club in Vietnam both work with male perpetrators of violence against women to help them develop non-violent views of masculinity (Hoang et al., 2013).

  Operated by EngenderHealth, Men As Partners (MAP) engages men in gender-related programming, taking the following into consideration: current societal male roles that allow men to influence women’s sexual health decisions; how men’s current gender roles often force men to engage in what is “manly”; and, risky health behaviors that men do have investment in with the health of themselves, women, and children (Ruxton and Oxfam, 2004, pp. 90). MAP is currently present in 15 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (EngenderHealth, 2014). MAP in South Africa has demonstrated success with changing male attitudes and behaviors towards women, particularly with boys at a younger age (Morrison, Ellsberg and Bott, 2007). MAP in South Africa uses a human rights framework to encourage the involvement of men in gender-based violence, sexual health dialogue, and gender equality advocacy. Uniquely, MAP creates a parallel between the oppressive gender roles that many black women experience, with the oppression many black men felt while living under apartheid (Peacock and Levack, 2004, pp. 176). A 2004 report on South Africa MAP demonstrates effectiveness with changing the beliefs and attitudes surrounding gender-based violence among its male participants. The report states:

  Before the workshop, 43 percent of the men disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that sometimes when a woman says “no” to sex, she doesn’t really mean it; three months after the workshop, 59 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Before the workshop, 61 percent of the men disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that women who dress sexy want to be raped; 3 months after the workshop, 82 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement (Peacock and Levack, 2004, pp. 182).

- **MASVAW: Addressing Violence Against Women and Gender Equality**
  
  Men’s Action for Stopping Violence Against Women (MASVAW), established in 2001 by two Indian men, was formed to work with men on decreasing violence against women and an overall promotion of gender equality at the community level, in Uttar Pradesh, India. Rather than focusing directly on women, the program hosted workshops, encouraging
men to focus on personal reflections of power and privilege, and creating personal action plans for how they engage with women in their life. Furthermore, “the MASVAW campaign aims at providing men with different ways of expressing masculinity, increasing their awareness of different forms of violence against women and motivating them to shun violence, protest against violence, support survivors, and provide new role models,” (CHSJ, n.d., pp. 16). Informal workshops eventually developed into a curriculum that was incorporated into schools (Das and Singh, 2014, pp. 69-70). A series of studies and documentation on the success of MASVAW between 2003 and 2010 identified that men can change and self-reflection is a key to allowing for change. As a result of participating in the program, men felt they had built a stronger relationship with their families and more trusting relationships among some male friends (Das and Singh, 2014, pp. 71). MASVAW is currently in its third year of working with UNFPA India on a project toward promoting gender equality in 100 villages in Maharashtra. Preliminary findings indicate that the program has increased men’s participation in household work and that villages are now largely receptive to this change (Das and Singh, 2014, pp. 73). In addition to increasing men’s involvement with household chores, some men shared their income with their wives in order to acknowledge her labor within the home. This in turn created a greater sense of awareness among fellow married village men and promoted the recognition of household chores as labor that contributed to the betterment of society (Roy & Das, 2014, pp. 32). From their personal experience spearheading MASVAW, Das and Singh have developed the following “principles” to be mindful of when working with men toward gender equality:

1. Men can change
2. The motivation for and pathway towards gender equality may not be similar for men and women
3. The ‘gender sensitisation’ pathway to gender equality assumes creating sympathy among men for women so that they provide more space for women
4. In order to engage men with the idea of equality, we need to provide them with opportunities to use their power and privileges creatively and responsibly rather than making them ashamed of the power and privilege they enjoy
5. Work with men on gender issues needs to move beyond the ‘gender-sensitive’ and ‘gender-transformative’ framework to include the different dimensions of social power hierarchies
6. Changing gender power relations in society is about creating social dissonance
7. In order to initiate the social dissonance that is necessary for changes in gender power relations, some men who have the conviction but also the courage and the confidence to do contrarian actions must take a lead (Das and Singh, 2014, pp. 74-76).

• Promoting Gender Equality in Nursery School

Working with young boys is an underrepresented initiative in the quest for achieving gender equity. Engaging boys at a young age is valuable because they are still shaping their identities as who they are as boys, and who they will become as men (Ruxton and Oxfam, 2004, pp. 44). Nursery schools in northern El Salvador are taking steps to engage with gender equity initiatives at a very young age. These special nursery schools seek to break down traditional gender norms, and encourage boys and girls to explore toys and activities
that they are not usually exposed to. The program also engages the parents of the preschoolers, and encourages parents to reinforce the behaviors they are taught in preschool (e.g. non-sexist language). Though this program is only a few years old, it holds promise for a new way of deconstructing gender at an early age, with the hope of decreasing future gender inequities (van der Gaag, 2011, pp. 43-44).

- **Program H**
  Developed by four Latin American NGOs (including *Promundo*) in 1999, Program H provides a leading example of an organization finding success in working with men and boys in promoting gender equity. Programming focuses on men’s reflection of their own masculinity, and includes a specific behavior change curriculum, a campaign for reforming gendered social norms, a constructed effort to reduce the challenges men face in obtaining health services and a rigorous method of evaluation (“the GEM Scale: Gender Equitable Male Scale”) (Ruxton and Oxfam, 2004, pp. 150-151). Program H creates a venue for boys and men to explore their personal gender identity, and allows boys to feel “cool” for caring about gender equity (van der Gaag, 2011, pp. 17). Additionally,

  Program H is theoretically based, and has been empirically shown to positively influence attitudes related to gender equality, including greater sensitivity to issues of gender-based violence, increased intention to use condoms, improved partner-negotiation skills, increased attention to health needs, and a greater desire to be more involved as fathers (for those young men who are already fathers). (Ruxton and Oxfam, 2004, pp. 150).

Due to its success, Program H has been replicated in over 20 countries, and even inspired the creation of “Program M.” Program M encourages young girls to also reflect on traditional forms of masculinities, how those masculinities influence their lives, and how to avoid perpetuating or reinforcing them within their personal relationships and the broader society (van der Gaag, 2011, pp. 16-17).
References


