Through Gendered Lenses

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About the Artist

Gabriela Leskur is a 2017 Bachelor of Fine Arts candidate in Visual Communication Design. Her work focuses on how visuals may aid in the dissemination of meaningful messages while utilizing a variety of techniques and tools, from traditional graphic design to 3D modeling to performance art.

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Acknowledgements

This year marks the eighth edition of *Through Gendered Lenses,* which highlights undergraduate gender studies research and scholarship at the University of Notre Dame. With sincerest gratitude, we present this journal in honor of those whose relentless commitment and determination make endeavors of this magnitude possible.

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Of course, we are grateful for the contributions of our undergraduate scholars whose work is the foundation of *Through*

Gendered Lenses. The Honor Society appreciates your time, enthusiasm, and dedication to gender studies scholarship, and we are honored to feature the work of our peers. No one understands more than we do your sacrifices and the elation that comes with a completed project.

In this spirit, we are humbled and look forward to future editions of this journal.

The Gender Studies Program

The Gender Studies Program is an interdisciplinary academic program in the College of Arts and Letters at Notre Dame that offers undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue a major (full or supplementary) or minor. The field of gender studies analyzes the complex intersection of gender and sexuality with other identities and sociopolitical factors, such as age, race, religion, class, and citizenship, in all areas of human life, especially in the social formation of human identities, practices, and institutions.

The Gender Studies Program gives scholars the methodological and theoretical tools to analyze gender in their intellectual endeavors and to apply the insights they gain to disciplines in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. It also provides students and alumni with an intellectual framework through which the analysis of gender and its cognates can be creatively and critically applied to personal, familial, professional, and civic roles. In the context of the Catholic identity of Notre Dame, Gender Studies facilitates the study of the intersection of gender and religion in the shaping of ethics, culture, and politics. Alongside our diverse array of courses drawn from across the university, our summer internship and academic credit internship programs emphasize the holistic and practical applications of a Gender Studies education at Notre Dame.

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As the primary unit of undergraduate student service and leadership in the Gender Studies Program, Triota offers Gender Studies students opportunities to engage their interests in gender issues beyond the classroom setting. Members of Triota contribute to an environment of academic excellence, encourage undergraduate research and scholarship in Gender Studies, foster relationships among students and faculty, promote interest in and awareness of gender issues, and academically represent the Gender Studies Program.

If you are interested in becoming a member of Triota, please visit our page on the Gender Studies website, **genderstudies.nd.edu**, to learn more about us or to download an application.

Letter from the Editor

Amidst the political extremity of 2016, we find solace here in the pursuit of scholarship and remain steadfast in our efforts to discover truth. Perhaps this journal, which highlights the intricacies of society, culture, policy, race, sexuality, and gender, can serve as a reminder that inquiry is the cure to complacency. Academia in this time is more than significant—it is necessary. The diversity of scholars and ideas here represents the limitlessness of the human mind and our capacity for empathy. We may face seemingly insurmountable obstacles in our desire to seek, protect, and uplift; nevertheless, we persist.

Gender is an intrinsic part of the construction of the human experience, and the work in these pages follows it to sites from the toxic masculinity in Irish dance to the medical care of sexual assault victims. This journal features scholars from a variety of disciplines who analyze various topics through gendered lenses. I would like to thank all the students who submitted their work to *Through Gendered Lenses* and commend their dedication to the pursuit of knowledge. These topics are neither easy nor simple, so special thanks to those students featured in this edition. Thank you also to the readers of Volume 8. I hope that, as you close this journal, you will have experienced something new or interesting. Let us always seek knowledge, celebrate creativity, and encourage passion. To the contributors to future editions to this journal, we look forward to your scholarship.

Arielle Sims, 2017
Managing Editor

About the Editor

Arielle Sims '17 is an undergraduate senior at the University of Notre Dame and pursues a Gender Studies major with a minor in Classical Civilization. Sims's research interests include the role and effects of globalization and mass communication on youth culture, music, and cultural exchange. She plans to incorporate arts, culture, and gender into her future careers of management, editing, and undue fame.

"I am the Lord of the Dance," Said He: Deconstructing Toxic Masculinity in Michael Flatley's *Lord of the Dance*

Moira Horn

Author Biography

Moira Horn is a senior Gender Studies and Pre-Health major at the University of Notre Dame from Cleveland, Ohio. In addition to her avid love for playing the cello and Irish dance, Moira's academic interests include the politics of motherhood and reproduction, global health, and feminist theory. During the fall of her junior year, Moira also spent a semester studying abroad in Puebla, Mexico, where she had the opportunity to do rotations in public hospitals and study at a local university. Throughout the following summer as a maternal health volunteer with Compañeros En Salud, an affiliate of global health NGO Partners in Health, Moira researched maternal identity and well being in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Chiapas, Mexico for her senior thesis in Gender Studies. Following her graduation from Notre Dame in May of 2017, Moira will return to work with Compañeros En Salud as the assistant in their community health programs; she ultimately plans to pursue a medical degree and a career in global health.

Irish dancing is both a percussive and lyrical form of dance, incorporating the use of loud, tipped hardshoes as well as ballet-like softshoes. Ireland's rich cultural history is woven within the stories of Irish dance and has evolved since its conception as a symbol of Irish nationalist resistance against British colonial rule. More specifically, the role of Irish dance in national politics can be traced back to a specific céili (an Irish group dance) and social event held in the Bloomsbury Hall in London in 1897 by the Gaelic League. About a century later, Michael Flatley and Jean Butler's *Riverdance* premiered as an interval performance act during the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest (Stanca 183). Shortly thereafter, Flatley created a new show, *Lord of the Dance,* which premiered in Dublin in 1996. Unlike *Riverdance*, a plotless celebration of Irish dance and other dances of Celtic origin, *Lord of the Dance* contains exclusively Irish material with a distinct plot. Moreover, *Lord of the Dance* has no female lead, but two dueling women: Saoirse the Irish Cailín and Morrighan the Temptress. Flatley, however, portrays the heroic Lord of the Dance, as an outlet for his monster ego to run riot (Casey 10).

Michael Flatley grew up in Chicago and is the son of Irish immigrants. Flatley did not start competing within the world of Irish dance until age 11, yet rose to secure a World Irish Dance title by age 17 in 1975 (Stanca 185). As Stanca points out, along with Flatley's accomplishments in amateur boxing and flute performance in his youth, Flatley believes that his greatest accomplishment is his modernization of Irish dance and the subsequent globalization and increased popularity of the traditional art form and sport (185).

Lord of the Dance is an Irish music and dance production that follows the conflict between the Lord of the Dance and the dark lord Don Dorcha over control of the fictional "Planet Ireland." The show opens with The Little Spirit, an androgynous character dressed in a gold bodysuit who invokes the Lord of the Dance and his followers by playing the tune "Lord of the Dance" on a tin whistle. Peripherally, there is also a storyline of love versus lust in the Lord of the Dance's inner conflict between choosing Saoirse, the Irish Cailín (commonly known as the "good girl") and choosing Morrighan the Temptress, a seductive gypsy woman (commonly known as the "bad girl"). The stories draw from both Irish folklore and Biblical references. For example, "Lord of the Dance," is a contemporary hymn in the Catholic tradition.

Michael Flatley's expression of masculinity is a social and performative manifestation of his diasporic identity conflict. As Natasha Casey points out, "American popular culture during the past decade or so has reinforced distinct and often contradictory images of Irishness, images that simultaneously reject and encourage historically familiar stereotypes" (11). This collective identity conflict arose from contested views of "whiteness" in United States immigrant populations throughout the 20th Century. Although the white skin of the Irish made them 'eligible' for membership in White America, it did not guarantee their admission into such a category, due to racial stereotypes constructed by British imperialism that distinguished the Irish as a separate race (Casey 15). For centuries, the Irish were racialized by others in British society as a means to justify oppression and violence against the Irish people. In response, Irish America adopted a racist

psyche, excluding members of other races in its Irish subculture (such as the Irish Traveller) in order to assimilate into Anglo-American culture. Paradoxically, Irish Americans were racist to other minorities in response to the discrimination they faced for decades. In her article "Riverdance: The Importance of Being Irish American," Natasha Casey explains this diasporic identity conflict:

> "From Irish America's participation in the nineteenth-century New York draft riots to the recent and well documented contemporary conservatism, misogyny, and homophobia of high profile Irish-American groups—'hyper-whiteness' as Lauren Onkey usefully termed it—all highlight the success of membership drive that began over three hundred years ago" (16).

Once Irish Americans gained theoretical membership into Anglo-American culture, they opted to return to the essence of their heritage, their 'authentic' Irishness. The conflicting duality of being both American and Irish is thus reflected in the art and works of Irish Americans, such as Michael Flatley. An article appeared in *New York Times* highlighting this phenomenon in *LOTD,* calling it "something like an Irish 'Triumph of Will'" (Casey 18). Irish Americans sought to authenticate their identities both as U.S. American and Irish by way of artistic expression, as can be see in *LOTD.*

As previously noted, *LOTD* contains exclusively "Irish material," therefore excluding other dances of Celtic origin and people of color. This places Flatley into this dual White American-Irish category. In order to further assert this dual cultural identity, Flatley expresses masculinity by way of placing characters within

the female cast, namely Saoirse and Morrighan, into sexualized and racialized gender roles. Several themes throughout *LOTD* illuminate constructs of hegemonic masculinity, sexualized and racialized gender hierarchies, and the female-nature/male-culture paradigm.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity

R.W. Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as the cultural dominance of masculinity characterized by aggression, emotional restraint, and heterosexuality. In Western patriarchy, there exists a certain prescribed form of masculinity to which men aspire in achieving their sense of masculine personhood. However, as Connell points out, "… 'Hegemony' does not mean total cultural dominance, the obliteration of alternatives. It means ascendancy achieved within a balance of forces, that is, a state of play. Other patterns and groups are subordinated rather than eliminated" (184). This cultural ideal of masculinity is, in reality, not an attainable goal. Rather, it is based a set of practices to which men will subscribe in order to situate their gendered selves within society.

In contrast, "There is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men" (183). Within this framework, women subscribe to forms of femininity that perpetuate the globally dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women. Connell also points out, "To call this pattern 'emphasized femininity' is also to make a point about how the cultural package is used in interpersonal relationships. This kind of femininity is performed, and performed

especially to men" (188). Emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity are expressed through polarized masculine and feminine performances of gender, as demonstrated in Flatley's *Lord of the Dance.*

Making sound often translates to power in Irish dancing. In "The Warriors" and "Warlords," the evil warlord Don Dorcha and the "good" Lord of the Dance train their soldiers for battle to control Planet Ireland. Throughout each of these "training sessions," the male cast's feet move faster to create louder, more complex rhythms. Don Dorcha (the dark lord) and the Lord of the Dance instruct their armies by examples of their dance skills and leadership. In contrast, the only scene in which only the female cast dances in hardshoes is in the dance titled "Breakout." In "Breakout," the female cast, led by Saoirse, performs a treble jig (also known as a "heavy jig" performed in 6/8 time signature) in traditional Irish dancing dresses. When Morrighan the Temptress dances onstage to confront Saoirse, Saoirse and her followers rip off their dresses to reveal their spandex shorts and sports bras. They then perform a faster treble jig, interrupted with moments of swiveling their hips back and forth and strutting across the stage. Although the female cast makes noise in this scene, it is not an assertion of power. Rather, this treble jig is a continuation of the female cast's expression of heteronormative sexuality. In an attempt to "out-sex" Morrighan the Temptress, Saoirse and the female cast must disrobe and dance, presenting an alluring image to both the audience and the Lord of the Dance. Moreover, the steps performed in "Breakout" follow a continuous treble jig rhythm, providing little variation such that the female cast may

demonstrate their creativity in their rhythmic skills. After "Breakout" is over, the Lord of the Dance kisses Saoirse, makes sexual purring noises at her, and takes over the stage with his army to perform "Warlords." Further, Flatley pauses several times throughout "Warlords" to ogle at Saoirse and kiss her while his soldiers dance. Once again, Flatley's dominating expression of masculinity and assertion of heterosexuality trump the leadership of Saoirse over the female cast.

Throughout *Lord of the Dance,* Flatley's feet are frequently featured as the focal point of each dance in which he performs. In contrast, the camera focuses more on the spatial movements of female cast members. For example, the female cast performs a slip jig in "Cry of the Celts" whereas Flatley dances a treble reel. This slip jig/treble reel distinction between the male and female casts continues throughout the show, except in cases where the entire cast dances together. A slip jig is a dance in 9/8-time that is performed almost exclusively by women in the Irish dance tradition. Performed in Irish dancing softshoes, the slip jig is characterized by large spatial movements and an effortless, gliding motion by the dancer; the camera focuses on these overarching motions of the female cast rather than on the movement of their feet. It is often considered the more ballet-like form of Irish dance. In contrast, Flatley performs a treble reel in his introduction to the audience. A treble reel is a type of Irish dance performed in hard shoes to 4/4-reel music; it is often a type of dance in which the performer shows off their rhythmic skills. In this solo performance, the camera focuses primarily on Flatley's feet and rhythmic skill, going as far as filming his feet from below the clear stage floor. This

distinction between the soft, graceful female cast and the rhythmic and powerful Lord of the Dance as well as the focus on the Lord of the Dance's feet demonstrate yet another example of Flatley's quest for hegemonic masculinity.

The Fallen Gypsy

Saoirse and Morrighan fight for Flatley's attention in a sexualized and gender performative manner, showing the clear distinction between the "good girl," a blonde, mostly demure woman, and the "bad girl," a gypsy woman with dark hair and consistently sexual dance moves throughout *LOTD.* This dichotomy follows feminist scholar Catharine MacKinnon's theory that men sexualize hierarchy. She argues that, "…male power takes the social form of what men as a gender want sexually, which centers on power itself, as socially defined. Masculinity is having it; femininity is not having it. Masculinity precedes male as femininity precedes female and male sexual desire defines both" (MacKinnon 418). In this context, the Lord of the Dance sets the sexual standard for himself, Saoirse, and Morrighan simultaneously. This sexualization of hierarchy coupled with colonial racism places Morrighan and Saoirse into subordinate gender roles.

Morrighan is first introduced to the audience in a dance titled "Gypsy," a solo in which she performs a reel in softshoes. However, there are several elements to this dance that distinguish her from the rest of the female cast introduced in "Cry of the Celts." First, the instrumentation of "Gypsy" includes an oboe, an instrument with a "non-Irish" sound. Also, the title of Gypsy racializes Morrighan into the category of Traveller Woman. Historically, Traveller women

"were identified as passive objects of male exchange as engaged in fortune telling and dealing in magical and/or medical potions or philters" (Helleiner 276). This stereotype arises from the racial categories constructed by British Gypsiologists, as Travellers were deeply stigmatized within the colonial framework of Ireland until the late 20th Century. At the same time, rural women in Ireland in the early 20th Century experienced a sort of domestication as Ireland gained more political and economic independence; these newly "domesticated" women were seen as weak and needing protection from the seemingly dangerous gypsy race. As Helleiner points out, "A heightened class/ethnic boundary between Travellers and non-travellers was expressed in gendered terms…accounts hint at a degree of exoticism and male desire for the Traveller woman" (Helleiner 279). Subsequently, gypsy women became objects of society's collective exotic and erotic sexual fixations. Saoirse and Morrighan thus represent the domesticated Irish woman and the exotic, sexualized Gypsy woman. Throughout "Gypsy," Morrighan waves her arms, flips her hair, and swivels her hips in such a way that may sexually attract the Lord of the Dance. The racialized and gendered nature of her dance further suggests Flatley's diasporic identity crisis: he must place the other characters of the show into deeply problematic, essentialist, gendered stereotypes in order to assert his own masculinity and Irish ethnicity.

Two scenes in which Saoirse and Morrighan battle for the Lord of the Dance's affection provide insight into Flatley's delineations of race and gender in *LOTD.* After Saoirse and the rest of the female cast have performed a slow treble jig for about one minute,

Morrighan confronts Saoirse and engages in a short dance battle with her. In response, Saoirse and the rest of the female cast disrobe and finish the dance in an almost defeat of the "temptress." Morrighan exits the stage and Saoirse gains the attention of the Lord of the Dance at the opening of the next dance, "Warlords."

"Stolen Kiss" opens with Saoirse gracefully performs a slip jig in what seems to be a final attempt at winning the affection of the Lord of the Dance. She initially succeeds, as the Lord of the Dance enters the stage and they perform a partner dance. The music shifts from a slip jig to a treble jig, demonstrating a gendered music change. The Lord of the Dance caresses Saoirse's face throughout their dance, denoting a dual veneration of and attraction to her. Shortly into their dance, Morrighan enters the stage and distracts the Lord of the Dance with her hardshoe dancing. They begin to dance, while Saoirse looks visibly jealous. Saoirse then interrupts Morrighan and the Lord of the Dance. Saoirse and the Lord of the Dance finish their affectionate duet, ending with a kiss.

These two scenes demonstrate Saoirse and Morrighan's sexualized characteristics as defined by masculine constructs of heterosexuality. Moreover, Morrighan's gypsy identity is congruent with Irish racial stereotypes about Traveller women. Traveller women are seen as more sexual, exotic beings whereas the white Irish woman is chaste, domestic, and demure. Morrighan and Saoirse's characters are defined by their relationship to the Lord of the Dance rather than by their individual stories, as Flately sexualizes the gender hierarchy of dominant men over submissive women in *Lord of the Dance.* One may argue that Morrighan's aggressive or assertive sexuality connotes agency, but the way she

expresses this sexuality seems only to fit the purpose of seducing the Lord of the Dance. Racial stereotypes and sexual gender roles delineated by the Lord of the Dance's affection reflect the ways in which Flatley places himself at the peak of a micro-societal hierarchy. In an attempt to negotiate his subordinated position in society as the son of Irish immigrants, Flatley constructs a sexually and racially dominant Lord of the Dance.

Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?

Women and all things feminine are typically associated with nature, and femininity is devalued within a patriarchal society. In her essay, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?," Sherry Ortner argues that because women are both subordinated and associated with nature, "We may thus broadly equate culture with the notion of human consciousness (i.e., systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature" (213). Within this model, through woman's body and its functions, social roles, and subsequent psychic structure, female subordination is ascribed to woman's association with the earth, separating woman further from the public sphere and the creation of culture. Similarly, as in the case of male high chefs or fashion designers, "…the high chefs are almost always men. Thus the pattern replicates that in the area of socialization— women perform lower-level conversions from nature to culture, but when the culture distinguishes a higher level of the same functions, the higher level is restricted to men" (216). This nearly universal secondary status of women entrenches them into rigid and gendered social expectations.

In line with the "mother Ireland" trope in Irish culture, this phenomenon is reflected in female Irish dancing style as a whole. As Foley points out,

> "Young female dancers, in particular, have dominated the prescribed national aesthetic of high frontal and large spatial movements. With their curled hair and heavily embroidered dance costumes, they are considered representative of the *national* perception of Irish step dance" (Foley 36).

Female Irish dancers typically perform gender in a traditionally feminine fashion. In *Lord of the Dance,* the female dancers wear feminine costumes, seemingly float and glide through large spatial movements, and present themselves in such a way that is meant to be visually pleasing to their male counterparts. As previously noted, this sense of femininity is arguably the result of R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity.

The women-nature paradigm is demonstrated through the opening scene of *Lord of the Dance,* "Cry of the Celts." The entire show opens with a foggy landscape depicted onstage, from which the golden Little Spirit character emerges. The Little Spirit plays the Catholic hymn, "The Lord of the Dance," surrounded by the female cast lying on the stage floor. The women, arranged in sleep-like positions, are arched in such a way that one may not notice that they are there until the Little Spirit sprinkles glittery magic dust on them so they may rise and begin to dance. Four minutes into the first scene of the show, the female cast slowly rises, swaying into the initial position for the dance. The foggy landscape

coupled with the female cast lying on the ground suggests that the female cast is part of the landscape; the female characters are associated with the land from which they rise.

Two minutes later, as the female casts disappears from the stage, Flatley bursts out of a compounded spotlight center stage. He emerges from this excessively bright beam of light to perform his solo, full of complicated rhythms and arrogant gestures of artistic prowess. After about one minute of his solo as the Lord of the Dance, the entire male and female cast dances onstage from the wings. As the cast dances onstage, Flatley seems to direct them as if he were the creator of the world in which his character dances. He spins in a circle, arms outstretched, while the cast spins in a circle around him. He is the clear leader of the dance troupe, dramatically crawling and clawing towards the front of the stage for the finale. During the last several moments of this scene, Flately stops dancing to *strut* across the front of the stage, pretending to control the cast's movements. Juxtaposed with the passive introduction of the female cast, Flatley's abrupt and powerful introduction suggests that he has the agency in the creation and management of Planet Ireland. While the women come from a foggy landscape, Flatley and the male cast dance from the spatially "above" areas of the stage. Men, and, in this case, Flatley, are more closely associated with the creation of culture. Flatley is the leader and creator, whereas the female cast acts as the collective bearer of this fictional culture.

Towards a Feminist Vision of Irish Dance

What would a feminist vision of Irish dance look like? For the purposes of this study, I argue that a more "feminist" Irish dance

embraces diversity and inclusion as well as female leadership. As Jill Raymond and Janice Wilson describe feminism, it is "a powerful homeopathic remedy which goes beyond the symptoms to the deeper causes of our troubles: the imbalance between masculine and feminine energies, manifested in the ills of patriarchy" (Treichler and Kramarae 9). Although feminism is a multiplural discourse, feminist theory at its core seeks agency for oppressed or marginalized populations. Within the context of Flatley's expression of diasporic identity conflict and subsequent toxic masculinity, a more feminist Irish dance would embrace female leadership and cast members of color. The casts of *Heartbeat of Home* and the Trinity Irish Dance Company exemplify this vision of Feminist Irish dance.

Heartbeat of Home premiered in October 2013 in Dublin, nearly 20 years after the premiere of Butler and Flatley's *Riverdance.* According to the show's website, "it follows the casting of world class dancers…who are not only at the top of their profession in Irish but also in other dance forms" (Heartbeat of Home). Choreographed by David Bolger and John Carey, *Heartbeat of Home* is a celebration of Irish dance coupled with a multicultural fusion of Latin, Afro-Cuban, and other forms of percussive dance. The identity construction of characters is left ambiguous, ridding the show of the toxic racial and gendered stereotypes of *Lord of the Dance.* The cast is also more racially diverse than that of *LOTD. Heartbeat of Home* follows the leadership of Ciara Sexton, an Irish dancer who rose to fame through her portrayal of Morrighan the Temptress in *LOTD.* Sexton, in a way, transcends the stereotypes associated with Morrighan through her strong leadership in

Heartbeat of Home. Rather than fitting into the sexualized gypsy role, she demonstrates agency and power in her central role in this multicultural celebration of dance.

The Trinity Irish Dance Company, based in Chicago and directed by Mark Howard, follows similar trends of female leadership, diversity, and this sort of "dance androgyny" in their performances. Most notably, their choreography titled "Push" features four dancers performing an acapella treble reel, two female and two male. The male dancers wear kilts, high socks, and a t-shirt while the women wear armor-like black shirts with black leggings. The dancers perform an intense battle, complete with rhythmic skill and physical stamina. In this visual role-reversal in costumes and the equal sense of power between men and women, this piece follows a feminist vision of Irish dance. Throughout the rest of the show, female cast members act as the leaders for most dances, or share leadership roles with male cast members. While potential for growth remains within the broader culture of Irish dancing in terms of female leadership and diversity, these two examples demonstrate a shift in the popular discourse on and construction of modern Irish dance.

Conclusion

Through expressions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, racial and gendered stereotypes of gypsies, and the woman-nature/man-culture paradigm, Michael Flatley negotiates his conflicted Irish-American identity. Because of Flatley's origins as the son of Irish-American working-class parents, he constructs the character of the Lord of the Dance as dominant and masculine while painting female characters as

subordinated beings. However, there are several examples of feminist visions of Irish dance that exist today that may offer an alternative to Flatley's "modernization" of Irish dance. As an Irish dancer myself, I recognize that something as culturally rooted as Irish dance will always be bound up in antiquated norms or restrictive conditions. However, when embraced as a site of expression and acceptance, Irish dancing may transcend its toxic stereotypes and gender roles as they are reflected in *Lord of the Dance.*

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Compassionate Care for Victims of Sexual Assault

Malavika Praseed

Author Biography

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With an issue such as sexual assault, the only way to truly understand the intricacies of the issue is to listen to firsthand stories. As the Internet allows for relative anonymity and freedom of expression, this has become the preferred avenue for survivors to share their stories, informing the general public and making sexual assault more of a public outcry than it has ever been. One such story, posted on the feminist website *XoJane*, detailed an aspect of sexual assault that is commonly overlooked: the perspective of the victim at the hospital. The author details a "7-hour ordeal," complete with long waiting periods, callous regard from healthcare professionals, and her own affection for the victim's advocate (Coil). This is not an uncommon experience for sexual assault victims. Due to the lack of emotional and physical regard for the patient, some survivors refer to the medical exam process as being "re-raped" (Campbell and Diegel).

Efforts have been made to improve clinical care for victims, most notably through the use of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs), but many hospitals lack these specially trained individuals. The clinicians that hospitals often have, doctors and nurses alike, are often ill-trained in handling these cases. Indeed, there still exists a stigma against sexual assault victims who report to the emergency room, that they are mere distractions from car crash victims or those in life and death situations—the "real emergencies" (Corrigan 6). When sensitivity, conscious effort, and understanding from medical professionals combine to provide compassionate care, this can allow victims to heal both physically and emotionally.

The theory of compassionate care is a simple one, but is often

overlooked from the medical perspective. Simply put, compassion in the medical context can be defined as "a sensitivity to the distress of self and others with a commitment to try to do something about it and prevent it" (Shea, Wynyard, and Lionis 69). This differs from the commonly held belief that compassion is equivalent to sympathy. The sense of agency that comes with compassion is critical to the work of clinicians.

The term "clinicians" is used here because it is usually nurses who have the first direct contact with sexual assault victims, with doctors arriving afterwards to treat any severe injuries that might have occurred. Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals are responsible for compassionate care towards their patients. Thus, this paper is addressed to clinicians as a whole.

Treating patients with dignity and respect, as well as with genuine interest in their condition, is essential to improving patient care. Studies have shown that closer relationships between clinician and patient can affect quality of life and prognosis for a range of conditions, from diabetes to chronic pain to cancer. It particularly helps with treatment adherence, meaning that patients stick to their prescribed treatments, due to emotional support from their clinicians (Lown, Rosen, and Martilla). In the case of sexual assault, treatment adherence may not seem to be as applicable, but the clinician can use methods of compassionate care to empathize with the patient, relate to their suffering, and urge them to seek legal recourse, regain a sense of self-worth, and possibly leave their abusers if the assault occurred in a domestic setting. While these topics are often beyond the scope of an emergency room clinician and are often left to qualified therapists, small gestures can make a

tremendous difference in the healing process. Throughout this paper, I will investigate the gestures that come together to create the multifaceted expression of empathy that is compassionate care.

At the onset of the medical visit, is important for the clinician to be cognizant of his or her body language and nonverbal interactions with the patient, which can set the tone for the visit as a whole. Nonverbal interactions are one of the clearest ways for a clinician to express emotions and to understand the emotional response of patients (Mast). Additionally, higher patient satisfaction rates have been reported when clinicians "had eye contact with the patient, leaned forward, had an expressive tone of voice and face, and gestured much" (Roter et al). These may seem reasonable reactions in active listening situations, but can often be overlooked by weary clinicians. Emergency room nurses can work upwards of 12-hour shifts, often with significant sleep deprivation, and it can be difficult for them to remember the nonverbal elements of communication. However, these skills are especially crucial when interacting with a sexual assault victim. Many victims show symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and even in the initial hours after an assault, can show severely enhanced startle responses when faced with unknown stimuli (Foa et al). Clinicians can benefit their patients by sitting at eye level with patients, softening their voice and affect, and avoiding sudden loud noises.

In addition, clinicians must be prepared to address the gender dynamics of a clinician-patient interaction. This is not often an issue, as most nurses are female and most sexual assault victims, overwhelmingly female, prefer a same-gender clinician to conduct the medical exam. While most hospitals are aware of these

preferences, staffing issues may prevent an ideal clinician from conducting a medical exam, especially with the increase in male nurses in several hospital systems. If a patient specifically requests a clinician of a certain gender, clinicians should be sensitive to these requests and do their best to honor the patient's wishes, or at least provide an empathetic response if these requests cannot be addressed.

The experience of a sexual assault victim upon reaching the hospital can be a long, arduous journey. Only 344 of every 1,000 sexual assaults committed are reported to law enforcement, and while it is possible to seek medical treatment without reporting the assault, many victims downplay the severity of their assault and choose not to seek medical attention (Department of Justice). Those who do seek medical treatment are faced with the overwhelming physical and emotional invasiveness of a medical exam or, in the case of reporting an assault to law enforcement, a rape kit. If a victim chooses to receive a rape kit, she is subject to swabbing, blood draws, intimate photographs, and speculum exams. Her clothes are taken and preserved for evidence. Her fingernails are scraped and hair brushed. She is not permitted to eat, drink, or even use the restroom until the kit is complete (Linden). This would feel dehumanizing for any patient, but can be scarring for a victim whose privacy has already been invaded in a most intimate manner. Doctors who see the patient after the exam, as well as nurses who conduct the rape kit and other aspects of the medical exam, are well-served by paying attention to the patient. As stated before, body language can speak volumes, including interpreting the clenched fists and closed eyes of a traumatized

patient. It is helpful to ask the patient's consent between stages of the exam. Simply asking, "Is this okay?" or "Are you feeling okay?" during the exam on numerous occasions is a showing of humanity that these victims need. Overall, honoring consent and human dignity in cases where these have been blatantly disregarded can be especially meaningful to the patient.

In the realm of emotional invasiveness, the endless questioning that occurs during a hospital stay can feel incredibly stifling and uncomfortable for a sexual assault victim. Nurses, doctors, police officers, administrators, and others ask countless questions about the event, including the patient's location, circumstances, questions about the perpetrator, and so on. While law enforcement is known for being judgmental when it comes to sexual assault, clinicians are susceptible to victim-blaming as well. Boston-area physician Judith Linden says that this is the biggest mistake clinicians can make when dealing with sexual assault victims, stating that "Often [clinicians] may question the history given by the patient, who may be intoxicated. Some of the patients may be sex workers" (Seligson). The perspectives that Linden mentions perpetrate a damaging myth about sexual assault, that some women bring the act upon themselves through their actions or professions. Linden also says that it is not up to the medical professional to identify sexual assault. This seems to go against the physician's natural inclination to diagnose, but is actually essential to compassionate care in this case. It is up to the victim to decide if they have been assaulted. Even though this can come into question during legal recourse, it is not the clinician's duty to deny the victim's claims, only to treat the physical and mental trauma that can result. One of

the most valuable things a physician or nurse can say to a patient is one simple statement, "I believe you."

Avoiding judgment when treating sexual assault victims can be difficult, especially when victims act in atypical ways or present implausible stories. Victims who lack memories of the event, resist the physical trauma, or even laugh and smile, may stump medical professionals and law enforcement alike. False accusations may come to mind; however, statistics have shown that false reports of sexual assault are uncommon. These seemingly strange reactions can be attributed to biological sources, and have been investigated in depth in the last few decades.

Dr. Rebecca Campbell is one of the most preeminent researchers in the neurobiology of trauma, and has devoted her life to debunking the myths around sexual assault and post-traumatic reactions. Although not a neuroscientist by training, Dr. Campbell cites the anatomy and biochemistry of the brain when assessing trauma. Sexual assault causes a buildup of hormones called catecholamines, which are implicated in the fight-or-flight response, and this can in turn affect how the brain functions. These hormones interfere with the hippocampus, which is responsible for encoding memories, and with the amygdala, which governs over visceral feelings of anger and fear. Catecholamines can disrupt the processing of the hippocampus, often leading to the erasure of of memories regarding the traumatic event. They can also lead to an overactive amygdala, which may take over when the person experiences mental and/or physical trauma. It is almost impossible for some sexual assault victims to act in a calm, logical manner due to this overactive amygdala (Campbell).

Additionally, another class of hormones called corticosteroids can also be implicated in trauma, leading to a loss of energy. This can result in tonic immobility, when the body shuts down in response to trauma. This is actually an evolutionary response, based on a mammalian instinct to 'play dead' in times of duress (Abrams et al). This reaction is certainly a possibility, even though it may be difficult for doctors or law enforcement to believe that an individual could be raped despite a lack of protest. Implausible sexual assault stories or gaps in knowledge do not necessarily mean a false case. In the words of Dr. Linden, it is not the clinician's place to make a judgment call, particularly when one has a firm grasp the biological basis of trauma.

It is at this point in the examination, after understanding and approaching the patient in a careful, empathetic manner that the clinician can transition to discussing medical options with the patient. Motivational interviewing is typically the strategy used in these cases, which can best be described as "a collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change," from a psychological perspective (Miller and Rollnick 12). While this definition outlines a strong goal for changing health-related behaviors, such as smoking or overeating, the definition must be altered to face the specific challenges of sexual assault. The only goal in the aftermath of an assault is for a victim to heal, and emotional and physical healing operate on drastically different timelines. Emotional healing depends on a variety of factors, including social support, coping mechanisms, and overall self-perception. Not every victim escapes this trauma without lasting effects on his or her wellbeing. For

instance, it has been shown that body dissatisfaction and general feelings of worthlessness are closely correlated to past sexual victimization, especially among younger women (Billingham and Patterson). If left unaddressed, these issues may cue in future abusers, leading to a cycle of sexual violence (Classen, Palesh, and Aggarwal). These issues may take years to untangle and often require a qualified therapist, beyond the scope of the emergency room clinician. However, as stated previously, clinicians can address these emotional deficits on at least a superficial level, acknowledging pain, apologizing for invasions of privacy, and affirming the victims' stories. The clinician can, however, make a true impact in physical healing.

Emergency contraceptives such as the Plan B pill have been the source of some controversy, particularly in religious hospitals. In prior years, emergency contraceptives have been withheld, state laws notwithstanding, "because of the objections of individual providers, hospitals, or community members (Corrigan 7)." However, in recent years, even Catholic hospitals have begun to provide Plan B, a non-abortive drug, to sexual assault victims (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). A wide variety of date rape drugs can also be tested for, in cases where the victim remembers little about her assault or there are other reasons to believe she could have been impaired at the time. Preventative prophylactics for sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, are also available in many hospitals. These treatments have pros and cons. For instance, the preeminent HIV prophylactic must be taken each day for 28 days, leads to nausea and fatigue, and can be linked to long-term liver damage (Smith et al). But it still remains the only

HIV prevention strategy on the market and is often recommended to victims who have been anally raped, particularly by a same-sex partner (Grant). The decision to receive these treatments is largely up to the victim, and this consent must always be respected. Clinicians can use motivational interviewing skills when at-risk patients refuse treatment, but must do so judiciously.

The four principles of motivational interviewing are engaging the patient, focusing on the issue at hand, evoking reasons for change, and planning a path forward (Miller and Rollnick 32). Their application to advising victims of sexual assault can best be illustrated with a sample case study. Consider a young woman raped by her intoxicated husband. A doctor might suggest STD prophylaxis to prevent against chlamydia, gonorrhea, and the like. This woman, still reeling from the events of the assault, may insist that her husband is a good man, rarely drinks, and would never be unfaithful to her and contract an STD. While STD rates of transmission are significant in sexual assault victims, these are often preexisting conditions that occurred before the rape (Estreich and Forster). If the young woman in question claims to be monogamous, it can still be the physician's prerogative to recommend preventative treatment. Engaging the patient would involve listening to the victim's story, empathizing when she mentions her relationship with her husband or her confusion at the assault, and denying any assertions that she brought this upon herself. Focusing would involve putting aside the clinician's own agenda to hear what the victim wants to accomplish. Perhaps she wants to heal, move forward, and return to her husband. Perhaps she wants to prevent pregnancy and consider more permanent

birth control options such as an IUD or implant. Skills such as affirming, asking open questions, and summarizing what the patient says in order to understand are helpful at this stage.

Evoking involves delving a bit deeper into the reasons illuminated during the focusing stage. The clinician can also calibrate his or her own behavior, such as realizing that pushing for STD prophylaxis is becoming invasive and does not fall under the patient's goals. Patients can always receive treatment for STDs if diagnosed later, so pressing a single agenda may not be worth the emotional toll this can take on the patient. Lastly, planning a way forward with the patient may seem more pertinent to law enforcement or therapy, but a clinician can provide necessary resources for further treatment. Maybe the young woman in our example is of limited resources. A clinician can recommend low-income resources, such as counseling or a local Planned Parenthood health center, in order to move forward and protect herself. After such a conversation, the young woman may feel valued and understood, and may consider treatment in present and future. The process of motivational interviewing helps on both a physical and emotional level, and even in short time frames; a clinician can make very efficient use of these principles.

Many of the theories and examples that have been provided have been just that, theoretical, and they suggest that little has been done on the medical front to aid victims. Medical care for sexual assault victims has indeed improved over the last few decades, and much of this can be attributed to SANEs. SANEs, or Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, are specially trained to aid victims of sexual assault. These are emergency room nurses who undergo

courses, often 40 hours in length, to achieve certification. Guidelines include both classroom coursework and hours of practicum. SANEs are trained to address the concerns of a variety of populations, including adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Pediatric sexual abuse training is often separate and requires its own certification (International Association of Forensic Nurses). Most importantly, SANEs understand the nuances of the medical exam, the circumstances that surround sexual assault, and how to address the patient in a compassionate manner, addressing myths and misconceptions without steamrolling concerns.

SANE training is voluntary, and the number of SANEs per hospital depends on resources. In South Bend, Indiana, Memorial Hospital only has one SANE, whereas St Joseph's Regional Medical Center has 19, 10 of which are trained in pediatrics as well (Grant). These are 20 of the over 1,300 SANEs certified worldwide, although the turnover rate can be high (Buckley). Nancy Grant, a SANE nurse at St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center, states, "the lifespan of an average SANE nurse is around two, two and a half years." This shows the importance of increasing training programs. The work is even more grueling than the day-to-day life of an emergency room nurse, which is difficult to fathom. Nevertheless, hospitals should allocate resources to train these nurses and to increase awareness of their need, certifying nurses regularly to counteract the turnover rate. SANEs are a step in the right direction, and combined with compassionate care throughout the healthcare discipline, sexual assault victims can begin to receive the best possible care.

What I have learned about sexual assault stems from curiosity, passion, and my training as a victim's advocate in South Bend, Indiana. I am not a survivor, and the perspectives I share are nowhere near as valuable as the firsthand stories from victims. What I can claim, however, is my awareness of apathy among victims when it comes to treatment. Many are ashamed to confess their stories to cold, unfeeling doctors and busy, tired nurses. Many feel as if they're wasting their own time and the time of others. But these are misconceptions that must be broken down. The medical profession is one of caring and concern, along with agency. Doctors and nurses enter the field with a desire to heal, and good clinicians recognize the unique concerns of sexual assault victims and how difficult it can be for them to heal. It is up to the medical profession to rise to this challenge, and even small differences in questioning, affect, and tone of voice can make an impact on the victim's path forward to wholeness.

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Historical and Current Influences on the Black Reproductive Movement and its Human Rights Focus

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Author Biography

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A woman's ability to control her own reproduction has long been fought for, and while this issue may seem universal, women from diverse social groups often experience this struggle differently. Despite these disparities, the dominant reproductive rights movement has been centered around the needs of middle-class White women. The lack of intersectionality within the reproductive rights movement has led to negligence on issues affecting women who do not identify with these classifications. Additionally, the reproductive rights movement has primarily emphasized abortion rights legislation while overlooking access to reproductive healthcare.

Black women's ability and opportunity to mother children has consistently been undermined by authoritative institutions, which have viewed Black women's reproduction as a site of political and social struggle that disregards Black women's agency and well-being. Beginning in the slave period, Black women have been denied the opportunity to choose when or if to have children through sterilization efforts, birth control coercion, and the appropriation of Black social movements by right-to-life groups. To combat this politicization, mainstream feminist groups must recognize that women of color face unique challenges and experiences when fighting for reproductive health services, and should adopt the human rights focus that Black reproductive movements emphasize.

Black Motherhood in the Slave Period

A woman's position in American society is framed by her position within the motherhood paradigm, but the perception and

support of motherhood dramatically differs between groups. White women have often advocated for the ability to choose when to have children so that their own economic and academic attainments would not be hindered. In contrast, Black women have and continue to particularly fear the repercussions their children would face if brought into the world. Slave owners had economic incentive to control black fertility, since a slave woman's children belonged to her master by law. Consequently, slave masters often forced their female slaves to bear as many children as possible. This relationship "marked Black women from the beginning as objects whose decisions about reproduction [were] subject to social regulation rather than to their own will" (Roberts 23).

To resist this oppression, slave women tried to obtain birth control and abortive options to limit the number of children they bore and prevent their potential children from facing a life in slavery. In *Women, Race, and Class,* Angela Davis notes that Black women did not seek abortions out of their "desire to be free of their pregnancy, but rather [out of the] miserable social conditions which dissuade them from bringing new lives into the world" (Davis 204). Black women sought reproductive choices in the United States to protect the human dignity of their potential children, rather than to pursue personal opportunities outside of pregnancy as the dominant rhetoric of the early reproductive rights movement advocated. While reproductive rights became a more prominent mainstream cause, the history of socially regulated reproduction remained ingrained in Black American perspectives. As such, it is important to consider the historical and cultural frame of reference of reproductive rights, as it may

influence Black Americans' current perceptions and insights in the fight for reproductive justice.

Voluntary Motherhood and the Rise of the United States Eugenics Movement

As the women's liberation movement gained popularity at the end of the 19th century, a divisive rhetoric developed among primarily White women's groups, which alienated women of color by ignoring their unique struggles. Many outlets of expression made it clear that women were eager for a way to control their reproduction. Methods that predate every form of modern birth control were described in women's magazines as early as 1844. A recipe in one such magazine described "Hannay's Preventive Lotion," which promised "infallible [success], if used in proper time" (Davis 206). While home remedies were popular, the women's liberation movement also promoted the concept of abstinence within marriage, termed "voluntary motherhood." Activists rallied around the concept of voluntary motherhood and considered it necessary to attain political equity through career and educational development.

However, these goals for political equity were often only attainable to White, middle-class women, and voluntary motherhood effectively excluded all women who did not conform to this identity. Working-class women were unable to pursue fulfilling careers and self-development, since they were constantly fighting to remain economically solvent on a much more fundamental level. Despite these disparities, the concept of voluntary motherhood did gain acceptance among women, as

evidenced by the drop in the birth rate near the end of the 19th century. Angela Davis notes in *Women, Race, and Class* that, "by 1890, the typical native born White woman was bearing no more than four children" (Davis 208). This was met with great concern in official circles, with President Theodore Roosevelt claiming the falling White birth rate was a form of "race suicide" (Davis 209). Fear of a weakening White race enabled eugenics to bear serious influence on the rhetoric used by the pro-birth control movement.

In *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, Dorothy Roberts examines how the view of early birth control shifted from a feminist version of "voluntary motherhood" to a more "gender neutral goal of family planning and population control" (Roberts 25). This shift enabled birth control to stop being viewed as a "women's issue" but rather as a policy that could help the public through population control—a change in rhetoric that would ultimately disproportionately affect poor Black women. One prominent birth control advocate, Margaret Sanger, utilized the gender-neutral eugenics movement to promote the widespread acceptance of birth control. While Sanger made great advances in the birth control movement, her actions also enabled the use of birth control as a tool for discriminatory population control.

Eugenics aimed to create a race that was most fit to thrive socially, intellectually, and economically. This was based on the principle that "certain identities, such as race and gender, are salient in American political culture due to long-standing beliefs of politically important differences between people of different races and different genders" (Hancock 3). Welfare policymakers theorized that the people with the most children were actually the

least fit to raise children. The eugenics movement believed that targeting families on public assistance would ultimately lower the rate of poverty. Although these practices were discriminatory, Sanger was able to use popular eugenics rhetoric to advance birth control access in showing that it had purposes other than promoting women's health and freedom.

While White eugenicists promoted birth control to preserve an oppressive social structure, Black communities embraced birth control to topple it. By the 1940s, 40–60% of Black communities were already practicing some form of birth control (Roberts 83). However, most of these forms of birth control were unreliable (such as the calendar method) or put women at the liberty of men (such as the withdrawal method). The prevalence was evident in the plummeting Black fertility rates when compared to other races. While some historians write this difference off as indicative of Black people's poor health, others attribute this to the prominent use of birth control in Black communities (Roberts 83). Though Black communities in general were accepting of birth control, there was some discord between Black men and women. Some Black men viewed birth control as a form of "race suicide," while women were concerned about the personal health and well-being of themselves and their children.

Both the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam presumed that the government's promotion of birth control was a disguised population-control strategy (Mjromano). However, this argument was often labeled as "male rhetoric for male ears"—the Black Panthers still provided birth control through its free health care program (Roberts 40). In contrast to these men's views,

women in the movement were witness to the consequences of pregnancy to Black women. Roberts notes that "women acknowledged that [birth control] addressed problems such as high maternal and infant mortality rates that resulted from social and economic barriers" (Roberts 84). Although Black women acknowledged benefits of birth control, they often were systematically denied it. Clinics stayed out of Black neighborhoods and poorer parts of town. Eventually women were able to access birth control—or, more commonly, sterilization—through public assistance programs.

The Rise and Legalization of Sterilization

As the pseudoscience of eugenics gained prominence, forced or coerced sterilization ran rampant in Black communities, robbing Black women of the choice to have children. The eugenics movement effectively changed the narrative of Black reproduction. Although Black women had previously been encouraged to bear as many children as physically possible, they were now pressured to keep their reproduction rates as low. In 1924, the U.S. Supreme Court supported a compulsory sterilization statute in Virginia that allowed medical officials to sterilize "potential parents of socially inadequate offspring" (Roberts 65). Additionally, women who were institutionalized were legally allowed to be sterilized, as held up in *Buck v. Bell* (1927), in which the U.S. Supreme Court found it to be constitutional for a woman in a mental hospital to be forcibly sterilized, a ruling which disproportionately affected poor, Black women.

Throughout the 20th century, 32 states enacted federally

funded sterilization programs (Ko). In Southern teaching hospitals, which served largely Black populations, "Mississippi appendectomies" were used as code to allow medical students to perform unnecessary hysterectomies. In North Carolina alone, one-third of all forced sterilizations were performed on children younger than 18 years old, as well as children and young adults with reputations as "unwholesome" and "delinquent" (Ko).

All of these factors are evident in the *Relf v. Weinberger* case of 1974. Two mentally-impaired, Black sisters, aged 12 and 14, were taken by their mother to receive birth control shots. However, when the illiterate mother was provided a consent form and signed her "X," she unknowingly authorized her two daughters to be surgically sterilized. In 1973 the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a case on their behalf, revealing 100,000 to 150,000 federally funded sterilizations. In addition, many others were coerced into sterilizations when doctors threatened to rescind welfare benefits (*Relf v. Weinberger*). The story of the Relf sisters was not unique— Black women were often coerced into or solely offered sterilization as a form of birth control.

The Pro-Choice Movement Emphasis on Legislation rather than Access

While sterilization robbed Black women of their ability to have children, mainstream feminist groups paid no attention to this in their fight for abortion rights. The use of the term "pro-choice," indicating a woman's option to have an abortion, grew in popularity and built up to the monumental legalization of abortion (*Roe v. Wade,* 1973). This rhetoric drove a wedge within several

feminist groups, as the emphasis on personal choice obscured the social context surrounding said choice (Silliman 33).

This divide emphasized the differences in the fight for reproductive rights and reproductive justice (Ross 15). Centered around "pro-choice," feminist groups of the early 1970s focused heavily on reproductive rights, which addresses the legal issues regarding reproduction. While this is essential in a reproductive movement, it ignores the context in which this legislation will be enacted. The lack of intersectionality in the pro-choice movement became even more evident after passing of the Hyde Amendment in 1976. The Hyde Amendment made abortive services ineligible for federal funds, severely affecting women of color (Kliff). While federal funds could not be put toward abortions, they were available for sterilizations—another example of the coercion toward sterilization that welfare-dependent people faced at this time. The pro-choice movement failed to launch an organized response after this decision, abandoning the non-middle class, non-White feminists who had also advocated for pro-choice movement.

In response to these developments, grassroots movements, often headed by women of color, formed to support people who were not attracted to the pro-choice movement's mainstream politics but still wanted to embrace a reproductive rights agenda. In 1977, the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA) formed and dedicated itself to activism focused on the everyday-woman by "going directly into neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, churches and the streets… in order to create a truly popular movement for reproductive freedom [rather than] a lobby of experts" (Silliman 33). Unlike the

National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) and Planned Parenthood, CARASA placed "sterilization abuse on par with… abortion rights" (Silliman 33).

Additionally, CARASA co-founded the Reproductive Rights National Network, which worked to put abortion rights in a larger social context. The Reproductive Rights National Network also "defined themselves as reproductive rights activists to distinguish their perspective from the single-issue politics of the pro-choice movement" (Silliman 33). These new organizations critiqued the dominant movement's chosen rhetoric and believed that there is no choice without access—especially for low-income women and women of color. Ultimately the Reproductive Rights National Network was unable to remain solvent, but it did highlight the difference between having rights versus having the resources to access those rights—a fundamental aspect of a reproductive justice movement.

The "Welfare Queen" and Effective Sterilization through Norplant

The 1980s conservative backlash to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s urged Americans to return to traditional family roles and values. Consequently, any perceived deviation from these values was viewed as a threat to the nation. This enabled President Ronald Reagan to demonize single-parent, welfare-dependent households—commonly headed by Black women. As this rhetoric became accepted in public spheres, public officials were able to propose legislation that coerced women into temporary sterilization through implantable birth control.

The pro-family movement was supported by anti-gay and anti-abortion groups and urged the American public to return to traditional patriarchal families. This movement also gained momentum from Protestant and Catholic Christian groups, effectively strengthening the Republican party. Additionally, a "Moral Majority" party was founded by Jerry Falwell in 1978, which claimed to "represent the real majority in America" (Silliman 26). In the name of morality, they often appropriated Black people's struggles to advance anti-abortion perspectives. In the early 1980s, Operation Rescue, a pro-life Christian organization, started a movement of prayer vigils and sit-ins—staged as a form of civil disobedience reminiscent of the civil rights movement. One young, Black patient entering an abortion clinic reported that a "young-looking, blonde and blue-eyed man screamed charges at her that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. would 'turn over in his grave for what she was doing' and that 'she was contributing to the genocide of African Americans'" (Silliman 28). Amid the co-opting of Black history, these pro-life groups worked together to elect Republican President Ronald Reagan to usher in the 1980s.

Reagan effectively demonized the single Black mother by introducing the "Welfare Queen" into public discourse. The Welfare Queen is a controlling image, a derivation of historical myths and stereotypes about enslaved Black women's supposed incapacity for mothering. During the slave period, there were two prominent stereotypes about inept Black mothers: the "Jezebel" and the "Mammy." The former abandoned her children to pursue her own sexual desires, and the latter neglected her own children to care for her master's.

These stereotypes contrast with the reality of Black motherhood during the slave period since Black women were to produce as many children as possible by their masters. These long-standing tropes perpetuated the criticism that Black mothers continued to face. During the Reagan era, the Black mother's public identity exposed her into unearned criticism and left her exposed to unfair welfare reform that viewed her, and her "constant reproduction," as a source of public welfare issues.

This demonization of the single, Black mother built support for legislation that encouraged forms of long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARC), which effectively sterilized the women for a number of years. Many feminist groups fought to bring birth control to poor communities, which, on the surface, can be viewed as progressive and promising. However, Black women were increasingly coerced into short-term sterilization partially due to the government-sponsored popularity of Norplant, an insert which promised long-lasting birth control for up to five years.

Norplant's appeal to policymakers was multifaceted. Unlike the pill, Norplant did not require recipients to visit the doctor's office for refills. It was also 99% effective over five years and did not rely on sexual partner cooperation (Roberts 134). These factors made Norplant ideal for Medicaid recipients in the eyes of some policymakers. Planned Parenthood found that while only 12% of its patients were Medicaid recipients, 95–100% of those who were implanted with Norplant were on Medicaid (Roberts 134). While policymakers could not make welfare contingent upon the insertion of Norplant, they could incentivize it. If women accepted Norplant, they could receive a one-time additional payment.

Furthermore, Norplant was one of the only affordable birth control options for women on welfare.

Policymakers found that incentivizing birth control through coverage was cheaper than providing welfare assistance for a child from birth to age 18. However, since government money was invested for Norplant, patients commonly had problems getting it removed before the five year period was over. Yvonne Thomas, a thirty-year-old Baltimore mother explained:

> I feel like because I'm a social service mother that's what's keeping me from getting this Norplant out of me. Because I've known other people that has the Norplant that spent money to have it put in and spent money to have it put out with no problems... That's how they make me feel, like '*you got this Norplant you keep it*' (Ellis).

Beyond this, patients encountered resistance when they sought removal due to adverse side effects. Norplant was accompanied with a variety of symptoms and could put women's sexual health at risk.[1] One patient recalled:

> [She] was still having heavy bleeding... and [medical staff] said, well, it takes a little while, so [she] went for a year... and it didn't get no better. [She meant], who wants to go 19 days' worth of bleeding? They don't jump to take it out by they sure do want to put it in

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[1] Symptoms associated with Norplant include headaches, depression, nervousness, change in appetite, weight gain, hair loss, nausea, dizziness, acne, swelling of the ovaries, and ovarian cysts. Additionally, users are less likely to use a condom, which leads to a 25% increased chance of contracting an STI.

(Accomando 206).

Rather than providing women with control over their own reproduction, Norplant was effectively a tool used by the government to control individuals. Specifically, this strategy allowed the government to control and prevent individual misbehavior. They viewed misbehavior as any reliance on public assistance to help raise a child. Officials were so suspicious of welfare recipients that they were reluctant to provide any type of care that could be interpreted as assistive rather than preventative.

Norplant was eventually taken off the market in 2002 amid misunderstandings about the efficacy of the implant. Health experts began to question Norplant's supposed five-year, 99% efficacy rate. The maker of Norplant, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, voluntarily took Norplant off the U.S. market and advised Norplant users to use a backup, non-hormonal form of birth control as a safeguard. Subsequent studies found these doubts to be unwarranted, and the FDA ultimately announced that backup control was unnecessary. Despite this development, Wyeth permanently removed Norplant from the market due to financial issues (Roan).

The Human Rights Emphasis of Reproductive Justice Activism Today

Although birth control advocates and policymakers are eager to increase birth control availability to poor women of color, they are also often unwilling to provide birth control that is easy to discontinue. Roberts sums the issue of government-recommended long-term birth control by noting, "it is amazing how effective

governments—especially our own—are at making sterilization and contraceptives available to women of color, despite their inability to reach these women with prenatal care, drug treatment, and other health services" (Roberts 37).

Similar to the appropriation of the civil rights struggle after the passing of *Roe v. Wade*, sexist and racist anti-abortion campaigns are still utilized by "pro-life" groups to shame women of color about abortions. As recently as 2011, billboards have proclaimed that "the most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb" (Bowie). This racist rhetoric is also still frequently used in law-making strategies. In 2016, the "All Lives Matter Act" was introduced in Missouri in reference to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which had gained prominence in the state.[2] This act asserted that life legally begins at conception, and it outlawed virtually all abortion services, as well as some contraceptive methods such as emergency contraception and certain intrauterine devices. The "All Lives Matter Act" not only limited women's reproductive rights established by Roe v. Wade (1973), but it also appropriated the BLM movement and further marginalized Black women's reproductive rights.

The BLM movement, founded by three women: Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometia, and Alicia Garza, actively supports reproductive justice and rights. In February 2016, BLM partnered with Trust Black Women and New Voices for Reproductive Justice to publicly affirm their stance on reproductive justice. Garza explained:

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[2] The BLM movement gained national attention after protests emerged in Ferguson, MO after 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot.

[R]eproductive justice is very much situated within the Black Lives Matter movement. And the way that we talk about that is that essentially, it's not just about the right for women to be able to determine when and how and where they want to start families, but it is also very much about our right to be able to raise families, to be able to raise children to become adults (Rankin).

Monica Raye Simpson, director of the Trust Black Women Partnership, also echoed a notion held by Black communities since the early 1940s. She noted that their group collaboration should be viewed as a call to action for the masses, including policymakers, to trust Black women by "acknowledging the expertise and leadership of Black women as the agents of change in our own communities" (Rankin).

Conclusion

The concept of "choice" in reproductive rights does not effectively translate to many Black women. Black Americans' reproductive history is rooted in forced reproduction, which caused many enslaved women to use abortion in an effort to protect the their potential children. Later, the women's liberation movement's perspectives on reproductive autonomy excluded many of women of color, and a drop in the White birth rate eventually spurred a widespread eugenics movement in the United States. This movement culminated in intentionally lenient sterilization laws that coerced or forced Black women to accept sterilization.

As the pro-choice movement grew, its leaders did not consider or fight the sterilization abuse that was prevalent in Black communities. In response, women of color formed organizations to place sterilization abuse on par with abortion rights. However, this could not prevent the abuse of long-term birth control methods, such as Norplant, which was enabled by the political rhetoric surrounding the myth of the Welfare Queen. To this day, Black women fight against these injustices, as seen through organizations such as the Black Lives Matter movement and the Trust Black Women Partnership, which emphasize the importance of a human rights rhetoric in reproductive policy.

Since the slave period, Black women have consistently centered their reproductive politics around human rights rather than women's rights. Black women and other women of color have fought for the ability to control their own fertility and to raise their children in environments conducive to their health and success. They have consistently had their reproduction viewed as a social policy, rather than a personal choice—leading to a disconnect between mainstream feminism and women of color reproductive activists. To truly support Black women and other women of color in reproductive causes, mainstream feminist groups must trust Black women, adopt a human rights basis for reproductive rights and justice, and acknowledge the history of Black reproductive politics.

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"Was Your Mother Counted?": Changing Gender Norms in Nigeria

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Introduction

Gender represents an important boundary in culture. Every community has different systems of gender and gender-separated institutions. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the Igbo people had a set of distinct, yet interdependent, gender relations wherein women are expected to have an element of control in the markets and ways to collectively express grievances against men. The introduction of colonialism in southeastern Nigeria caused women's roles in the market and politics to become invisible to the colonial state. When Igbo women did gender in the traditional ways they had for years, they realized that the colonial state was a different type of man who viewed their femininity as wrong. The colonial state was a different, untouchable man that tried to change women's positions in Igbo society through the use of violence.

Background

The Igbo people reside in southeastern Nigeria between the Niger and Cross rivers. For centuries, the Igbo lived self-sufficiently by producing their own food and textiles. As Europeans began trading down the coast of Africa in the fifteenth century, Igbo traders were middlemen in the slave trade for the New World. With the outlaw of slave trafficking in 1807, Igbo traders shifted to the raw materials trade, particularly with palm products for the industrial economy in Great Britain.[3] The Igbo people had a deep religious foundation rooted in the continuity of all parts of the cosmos, believing each person has a *chi* that could be reincarnated in a variety of genders. The community valued women mostly for

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[3] Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (2009), 102.

their ability to produce children, and hence infertile women were seen as "useless." The Igbo community was mutually interdependent in every realm of life—conception, politics, domestic affairs. Women and men were very separate yet lived in a mutually dependent society in which they relied on each other. Women were said to be "owned" by their husbands, yet women led fairly autonomous day-to-day lives.[4] Most Igbo wives had their own house within their husband's compound. Wives' responsibilities included sex, producing children, and producing meals, from which the husband chose which wife's meal he would eat.[5] Additionally, each woman had separate roles and responsibilities outside of the compound. The women's place in society was providing children to their husbands while maintaining independence among their husbands' other wives. The man's place in society was providing for their family and community through work, as well as collecting wives. Together, men and women depended on each other for the survival and success of the community. Overall, gender norms of Igbo society operated in set, separated institutions that relied on each other for the success of the entire community.

Gender Roles in Igbo Society

Part of the distinct gender norms in pre-colonial Igbo society were the gender-separated institutions of the marketplace and the compound. A common product was the creation of oil from palm fruits. Oil belonged to men, while women had control over the

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[4] Marc Matera and Misty L. Bastian and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria*, (2012), 18.
[5] Ibid.

kernels. With those kernels, as well as specialty foodstuffs, cloth, and pots, women ran local trade. They dominated small-scale trading of surplus farm foods, locally manufactured liquor, and twists of tobacco. Almost every woman was a trader of some sort, attending the marketplace daily to see her neighbors and co-wives. Local trade was female dominated because it was an "adjunct to the household" and typically considered a supplement to domestic occupations.[6] Men were not typically engaged in the market, but instead tended to their farms, lounged in their compounds, or engaged in village politics. The compound, *ezi,* marked the male-dominated space in pre-colonial Igbo societies where men ruled, and women had to compete with their co-wives in the compound hierarchy. The marketplace, *afia,* represented "women's share of a gendered system of mutual interdependence in the region" and therefore was considered sacred and important to women.[7] These separate but interdependent gendered institutions in Igbo society helped to construct Igbo communities and social norms that valued both genders for their contributions.

The introduction and spread of Christian missions throughout southeastern Nigeria also provided a gendered space. Whereas young men joined Christian missions and used their education to escape their villages and take advantage of new employment by colonial administration, young women joined Christian missions for other reasons. By joining churches, young women could refuse a potential husband selected by their families if he was polygynous

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[6] Onaiwu Obgbomo, *When Men and Women Mattered: A History of Gender Relations among the Owan of Nigeria* (1997), 123.
[7] Matera, *Women's War,* 22.

or not Christian.[8] When Christian missionaries came to Nigeria, however, they did not find as much value in female converts as male converts, because they believed society to be male-dominated. Because they were excluded from the missionaries' attention, women took on a "prominent role in the establishment of the indigenous independent churches."[9] Typically, these Christian ideals discouraged nudity of women. However, women missionaries did create women's education that included basic English and arithmetical literacy in addition to domestic tasks.[10] Church meetings provided a time for women to meet and discuss their daily lives. Church became yet another institution through which women had a gendered position in Igbo society.

Along with the marketplace and compound, there were also gender-specific associations and groups within Igbo society. Men formed associations and groups based on kin as well as age-grade associations. Women formed groups based on similar distinctions. *Ndi iyom* connected wives of men in a certain village-group. *Ndi iyom* members were connected by similar daily lives, including the local market. *Mikiri,* or market associations, had similar spaces where women gathered to discuss grievances. They discussed issues regarding the markets and set rules about markets, crops, and livestock, as well as conflicts within marriages.[11] Together, these women determined how to deal with local problems that affected both men and women. Because of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all sectors of Igbo life, most women ended

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[8] Ibid, 39.
[9] Ibid, 39.
[10] Matera, *Women's War,* 42.
[11] Ibid, 26.

up involved in political matters.[12] When women are involved in trade, "the more she must have full economic rights," as she cannot conform to being legally secondary when she makes decisions "involving controlling her own assets."[13] These associations were mechanisms with which to correct imbalances that could potentially occur due to changes in the community.[14] Most women believed that they did not attend community assembly meetings as individuals, but rather as a group, because "to them, female voices were more forceful when their views were presented as a group demand."[15] By combining into one gendered network, women could discuss matters that were important to them. This strengthened women's voices.

The pre-colonial Igbo male community had a strong respect for these gendered associations and networks. The decisions were respected by Igbo men and women when women's market associations set prices and rules regarding marketplace behavior and fines for punishments. This level of power and respect was not limited to decisions regarding markets. For instance, in the 1910s, women became frustrated with men stealing their domestic animals and an observed increasing female mortality rate.[16] After discussing the matter in their network groups, women developed a strategy to showcase their frustration and desire for change. Coming together as one, women left their villages and stayed away

[12] Obgbomo, *When Women and Men Mattered,* 152.
[13] Claire Robertson, "The Economic Roots of Women's Political Participation." *Power, Gender, and Social Change in Africa.* (2009): 42.
[14] Matera, *Women's War,* 20.
[15] Obgbomo, *When Women and Men Mattered,* 152.
[16] Matera, *Women's War,* 20.

for a month, forcing men to cook for themselves as well as prepare food for the women staying away. The village elders and women reached a solution in order to solve the increased deaths of women and animals.[17] This example is one of many ways pre-Igbo societies went about addressing wrongs in their system of mutual interdependence. Igbo men respected women acting as a collective in airing their grievances and valued their contributions to society. Men, including village elders, respected women as well as their collective shows of discontent and protest, and gathered together to cooperate.

To demonstrate disagreement over a particular injustice, Igbo women had specific culturally accepted ways to force change. In traditional Igbo societies, the use of force to protest one's interests was considered legitimate for both individuals and groups.[18] For women, a common way to protest their interests was "sitting on a man." "Sitting on a man" involved gathering at a man's compound to dance and sing defamatory songs that detailed women's grievances as well as questioned his manhood. It was often accompanied by "banging on his hut with the pestles women used for pounding yams, and perhaps demolishing his hut or plastering it with mud and roughing him up a bit."[19] This technique featured specific gendered ways of protesting, like using the pestles and dancing. Igbo women also used words and actions to demonstrate their anger. "[Igbo women] sang so that [colonial officers] might

[17] Ibid, 21.
[18] Judith van Allan, "Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1972): 166.
[19] Van Allan, "Sitting on a Man," 170.

ask [women] what [their] grievances were."[20] Similar to "sitting on a man", women considered *egwu* performances a key aspect of their lives used for shaming male authorities. These demonstrations stemmed from their meetings where they would "formulate, practice, and polish these songs/dances" in order to "unveil them to men and women of other villages at public events like markets or town festivals."[21] The protests were calculated demonstrations of women's frustrations presented in a manner through which men would understand what they were protesting and formulate solutions to the grievances. Igbo men traditionally respected and responded to these demonstrations to ensure the continued success of the community. "Sitting on a man" and *egwu* were important ways Igbo women executed their gender and frustrations in the pre-colonial world.

Introduction of Colonialism

Colonialism approached Africa as a "civilizing mission" with the belief that African societies needed to change from traditional ways towards Western traditions. However, the British colonizers did not easily defeat Africans' independence when they first arrived. The Igbo people had a strong anti-conquest resistance because they had never been dominated before.[22] Often times, the British had a hard time knowing if they had totally subdued an Igbo

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[20] Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi. "Vultures of the Marketplace": Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the Ogu Umunwaanyi (Women's War) of 1929." In *Women in African Colonial Histories.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 268.
[21] Matera, *Women's War,* 113.
[22] Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria,* 109.

village or not. This is because many villages tricked colonial men by offering peace but later reverting to aggression and rejecting the new authorities. In 1915 alone, the British had several expeditions against the Igbo villages, burning down villages and houses.[23] It was not until the 1920s that the Igbo sought reconciliation with the British authorities after losing many battles, men, and property. Because of this intense, deeply wounding fight for authority, the British refused to give power to the very elders who protested their takeover. Instead, the British created new positions for non-elders who were collaborators with the British. Rather than adapt the Igbo political structure of representative assemblies, the British elected more powerful chiefs separate from the previous power structures in Igbo communities. However, the Igbo people did not accept this new breakdown of authority without some element of opposition.

The colonial takeover created chaos in Igbo societies. The British divided their territory by combining unrelated villages together. They also gave power to Warrant Chiefs that lacked lineage or an elder status that was typical of power positions in Igbo politics.[24] Typically, the new Warrant Chiefs were opportunistic young men taking advantage of a new path towards power. Igbo communities resisted obeying the Warrant Chiefs except when they absolutely had to, since the British backed them up with the aim of creating a strong colonial presence. Although the Igbo people avoided using the Native Courts when they could, Warrant Chiefs could force cases into the official courts and fine

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[23] Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*, 109.
[24] Ibid, 110.

those who violated the new policies. The British colonial government, along with the Warrant Chiefs, created different policies for each gender. The colonizer "differentiated between male and female bodies and acted accordingly," making men the "primary target of policy."[25] Colonial violence was directed at Igbo men who did not immediately conform to the new wage labor and colonial systems. Despite the visible focus on the men, women were also negatively affected by the placement of the new Warrant Chiefs. Warrant Chiefs were oftentimes corrupt, taking girls as wives without customary processes, such as sufficient bridewealth and the opportunity for young women to refuse the match.[26] These newly nominated leaders frequently stole women's domestic animals and withheld women's returned bridewealth during divorce cases rather than repaying them to their husbands, which by custom meant that most villagers viewed the divorce as invalid.[27] Because of these new grievances with the introduction of colonialism, women "seem mainly to have blamed the Warrant Chiefs for corruption" and directed their frustration at them regarding newly created colonial problems.[28] Women's frustration with the changing times was not just limited to the corrupt Warrant Chiefs, but also a breakdown of women's previous roles in Igbo societies.

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[25] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 122.

[26] Judith van Allan "Aba Riots of the Igbo Women's War? – Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* (1975): 10.

[27] Matera, *Women's War,* 141.

[28] Ibid, 37.

With the introduction of colonial rule in Nigeria, the definition and distribution of work shifted away from the typical separation of the market and the compound. As wage labor was introduced, Igbo men began to receive cash in exchange for the value of their labor. However, women had significantly less access to wage labor and therefore cash, devaluing work that became associated with women. In the new value system of colonialism, "men's work was 'modern' and women's work was 'traditional' and 'backward'" causing the "deterioration in the status of African women" due to the "loss of the right to set indigenous standards of what work had merit and what did not."[29] Along with the decrease in perceived value of women's work, women often had to move away from their kin groups and women's associations because men traveled to urban areas for wage labor. Women's identity as offspring became secondary to their identity as wives, something that was at odds with the social acceptance of polygamy and women's sole responsibility for the children.[30] Wage labor devalued women's trading into simple "petty" trading while also disrupting women's access to their support groups.

The first major reform that created conflict was the introduction of taxation in the 1920s. The concept of taxation was new to the Igbo communities, and the very act of the census was at odds with Igbo tradition. The Igbo people believed that counting human beings could cause death.[31] Because of this strong belief in the connection between counting humans and infertility, the Igbo people took the census very seriously. Therefore, the very

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[29] Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women,* 150.
[30] Ibid, 152.
[31] Matera, *Women's War,* 105.

beginning of taxation caused stress and negative reactions from Igbo communities. Many women specifically did not understand the need to count women, compared to the "fruit-bearing trees," since they were needed for the survival of the society.[32] With the introduction of wage labor, women's work largely became invisible to colonial eyes. The wages men were paid by the colonial government were insufficient for family survival, however, so women's labor in the markets remained a necessity for the entire community.[33] The colonial government began taxing men in 1928, the same time as an increasingly depressed economy. The price of palm products decreased as villagers compared their tax rates, realizing that Warrant Chiefs exaggerated the incomes and populations under their control in part to boost their power.[34] The Igbo already viewed taxes as a corrupt policy that lost them money and created further stress. As a result, in 1929, when rumors began of taxing women, Igbo societies reacted quickly.

The Women's War

The British were blind to the power of women's associations and the intense reaction women would have to the prospect of taxation on top of the other injustices they were already experiencing with the new, disconnected Warrant Chiefs. When the British were considering expanding taxes, they sent local leaders to begin taking a census. This created concerns and rumors that a tax was about to be levied on women specifically. Due to the stories of the census, women called association meetings to develop

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[32] Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria,* 113.
[33] Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women,* 150
[34] Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria,* 112.

strategies in case the rumors were true.[35] In Oloko in the Bende district, the local Warrant Chief, Okugo, began the process of counting property in his district. He reached a married woman's property, Nwanyeruwa, on November 23, 1929, as she was extracting palm oil on her husband's compound. When Okugo asked to count her goats, sheep, and people, Nwanyeruwa retorted "Are you still counting? Last year my son's wife who was pregnant died. I am still mourning the death of that woman. Was your mother counted?"[36] Nwanyeruwa's quick reaction demonstrates the connection Igbo people made between death and the first census, as well as giving a gendered insult suggesting he was a "product of an abomination."[37] After the altercation, Nwanyeruwa marched to the market, signifying the importance placed on the market as a space specifically for women. Once she reached the market, she called out to Christian women having a feast after church. Despite the lack of connection between Nwanyeruwa and these women by age or religion, the gender connections and shared anger over a potential tax on women bonded them. The start of women's collective action against the colonial state began.

In typical Igbo tradition, the women began the techniques they always used to demonstrate their grievances. With Nwanyeruwa's story confirming the rumors about a taxation on women, Igbo women began their "locally recognized practice undertaken when men committed offenses against women."[38] The women who first heard Nwanyeruwa's story were the first to "sit on a man,"

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[35] Matera, *Women's War,* 136.
[36] Ibid, 137.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Matera, *Women's War,* 2.

specifically their co-religionist Mark Emeruwa who had attempted the first census previously. They danced and sung, gathering a larger crowd as the evening continued back in the marketplace. Next, the women decided to "sit on" Chief Okugo's compound in reaction to the incident. Based on their prior protests of "sitting on" compounds, these women were expecting a similar reaction of acknowledgement and a promise for restitution. Instead, the people of Chief Okugo's compound attacked the dancing women, injuring several of them. This was the first example of the new colonial state directly rejecting the traditional form of women's protest, but it was not the last.

As word of the taxation and subsequent attack spread through women's associations in the area, women began traveling to Oloko to join up with other women from different networks in unity against the prospect of taxation and harsh treatment of women during a respected tradition. Delegates, paid for by the women's market networks, traveled to different areas to explain the impending taxation and incident.[39] Different *mikiri* networks began organizing in their own villages. On December 9, a thousand women attacked a court in Owerrinta, knocking caps from Warrant Chiefs' heads and damaging property. On December 10, local women attacked a court in Aba and looted Barclay's Bank and European warehouses. These reactions were collective in nature, focused on inflicting damage on property rather than people. In demanding the Warrant Chiefs' red felt caps, the symbol of their position of power was now held by women. However, the most defining moment of the demonstrations occurred on December 15,

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[39] Van Allan, "Sitting on a Man," 175.

1929, when crowds of women gathered at the Utu Etim Ekpo court, warehouses, and houses of clerks. The women demanded to see the District Officer, reminding him of their important role and significance as "he was born of a woman."[40] Intimidated by the women dressed in sackcloth, faces smeared with charcoal, carrying sticks, the colonial state reacted by sending police and troops. As women continued their traditional protest, running and shouting, the colonial troops opened fire. Eighteen women were killed and nineteen were wounded by the rifles of the colonial government.

The shock generated by the involvement of guns in a practice that had never before been met with such violence spread throughout Nigeria. Women, as well as men, did not believe that they would be fired on because they were observing long-standing rituals. Although they had seen violence against Igbo men, there had not yet been such direct violence from the colonial state and their guns against Igbo women. Igbo women were expecting the typical protections of femininity that Igbo men granted them, especially during a long-standing ritualized gendered practice. Most Igbo men "generally approved" of the women's protest against the colonial government, as it was a common and recognized practice.[41] The incident on December 15 gathered an even larger crowd of women in Opobo, where they chanted "What is the smell? Death is the smell."[42] This time, when they marched on the district office and demanded written statements that women would not be taxed, the demands were met. However, during the wait for copies to be printed, women began pushing on the fence of

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[40] Matera, *Women's War,* 139.

[41] Van Allan, "Sitting on a Man," 175.

[42] Matera, *Women's War,* 262.

the district office. Once the fences fell, the British lieutenant fired into the crowd, killing thirty-nine women and one man passing by, as well as injuring many more. The previous gendered protests were no longer protected or respected by all men.

When these Igbo women "sat on" British officials, marching in large groups and chanting songs that questioned their manhood and spoke of their grievances, the colonial state did not see the traditional ritual. Rather, they saw the "savage passions" of the "mobs."[43] The disconnect between the colonial state and Igbo traditions was significant, particularly for women's traditions. The British colonial officials reported "never [seeing] crowds in such a state of frenzy" and were surprised to see how quickly and efficiently women gathered in protest.[44] The songs, some of which explained explicitly why the women were rioting, were seen as containing salacious lyrics that used sex as an insult towards men.[45] The women's nakedness and provocative song lyrics and gestures had been meant to call attention to the strength of the role of women. On the contrary, the British state saw these signs as a source of danger that took away their femininity and reinforced their stereotype of African savages with rampant sexuality, rather than women needing a certain level of protection. To the British, the Igbo portrayal of femininity was a powerful form of womanhood that they were not used to, especially compared to their Victorian wives and families. Even with this shock about the women's behavior, no further inquiry was made into the traditions and associations Igbo women formed. Instead, colonial reform

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[43] Van Allan, "Sitting on a Man," 175.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Matera, *Women's War,* 149.

came without any attempts to integrate former roles for women within Igbo politics. The colonial state went on to ban "self-help" or the "use of force by individuals or groups to protect own interests by punishing wrongdoers," basically removing one of the most significant ways women defended themselves.[46] The protests did not succeed in re-defining Igbo politics by reinforcing women's position in the community. Women's roles in the market and politics remained invisible to the colonial state. Although the protesting women received the colonial state's attention, the colonial state did not receive the message they had wanted to send.

The representation of the Women's War in the colonial state's Aba Commission gives insights into how the British state perceived these women. Most of the women who testified were listed as "housewives" despite the fact that the majority of them were involved in trade, showcasing how the colonial state ignored and minimized women's work in the market.[47] During testimonies, there were a few spokeswomen who were delegated by women from their towns to speak for the group. These spokeswomen avoided talking about their personal, individual experiences and instead gave "a statement of principles."[48] Women also testified that "market is [women's] main strength" and that markets have "been closed on account of Government employees."[49] This was the women's attempt to connect to the colonial state indirectly, as they had realized that the ways they had previously presented their grievances were ineffective with British government. The Igbo

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[46] Van Allan, "Sitting on a Man," 178.
[47] Matera, *Women's War,* 262.
[48] Ibid, 263.
[49] Ibid, 267.

women had to regroup and recognize that their status as women and their techniques directly clashed with the new colonial state.

Igbo women had many experiences of using the same techniques to express their opinions to men, such as their husbands, village men, and even village elders. Therefore, when they wanted their opinion to be heard regarding the grievances they were experiencing with the shift towards the colonial world, they went back to the strategies they used with their own husbands. By even believing that they could "sit on" the colonial state, Igbo women were showing their implicit acceptance of colonial authority. Igbo women wanted to air their grievances for some short-term goals such as avoiding taxation and punishing Warrant Chiefs for stealing their bridewealth. In accepting the colonial state as someone who could respond to their gendered expression, they accepted its authority as well. The colonial state was gendered male, both because of its makeup because of and how it was executed. Most of the colonial authorities were men, but even more importantly, they expressed their gender through stately power. The British men who travelled to Nigeria as the colonial government were distinctly different than Igbo men who showed power through multiple wives and control of wealth. Igbo women viewed the colonial government as men, and therefore used their traditional demonstration to reinforce their opinion.

Igbo women viewed the state as a man, but the way gender roles were defined between Igbo women and agents of the British state was dynamically different than anything they had known. When they tried to execute their gender by "sitting on a man," Igbo women realized that the state was a different type of man. New

gender norms were imposed by the colonial state. The colonial government positioned the state as a man, but an untouchable man, far from women's associations' grasp. Colonial men were untouchable due to the state of violence they had created. Women no longer had institutions to themselves. The market was distanced from women's domain, and they no longer had the ability to present their grievances in a collaborative world. The world was no longer as interdependent, and Igbo women were left without their influence in its socioeconomic elements.

New Gender Roles

The new reality of Igbo women's roles in colonial Nigeria was in direct opposition to the hope of the women's *mikiri.* Although women's existence had previously been in both a public and private field, the public domain began shrinking, basically devaluing women's positions and usefulness to their communities. Even though the Women's War saw success in the Warrant Chief system being replaced, women never found a new role within the new colonial institutions of the public sphere. Women's institutions did not disappear, but they lost their level of respect and influence in policing men's actions. Market associations played an active role in the new society, but they were no longer controlled by women exclusively. The colonial state was a type of man the Igbo women had not yet experienced, and they no longer had ways to demonstrate their grievances in a protected way.

With this new declaration of gender norms, Igbo men had the opportunity to grow in their power over women. The colonial state had successfully pushed struggles between families back into the

household and away from the collective, public action that the Igbo society had operated in previously. There was no collective way to air grievances about an abusive husband, but instead each woman was on her own. Igbo women were now subjected to a patchwork of patriarchies that further minimized women's role in society. The loss of "sitting on a man" as a public institution created greater gender inequality, because it effectively eliminated any way for women to unite publicly to enact change in their communities. In later Igbo societies, women utilized similar strategies as "sitting on a man" privately to address men's errs against them. In more recent history, Igbo women used leverage such as "withholding emotional and sexuality intimacy, or ... neglecting cooking and other household labor and material support" to deal with their husband's extramarital affairs.[50] With the redefinition of gender norms between Igbo women and colonial men, Igbo men also positioned themselves above Igbo women, creating a patchwork of patriarchies women were subjected to after the Women's War.

Conclusion

Igbo women in pre-colonial Nigeria had distinct roles in their villages. They had strong economic roles in the marketplace as traders, identified with both kin groups and market associations, and had dialogues with other women to harness female power to police Igbo men and set rules for the market. Women executed

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[50] Jordan Smith, "Promiscuous Girls, Good Wives, and Cheating Husbands: Gender Inequality, Transitions to Marriage, and Infidelity in Southeastern Nigeria." *Anthropological Quarterly* (2010): 148.

their gender through socially accepted rituals such as "sitting on a man." With the introduction of colonialism in Nigeria, the Igbo resisted before finally falling to the British state. Setting up Warrant Chiefs with no real lineage or connection to the people caused mass corruption and the disruption of social norms. Women were angry about Warrant Chiefs taking wives without the traditional process, as well as the interference of men in the markets. When rumors of taxation began, women gathered in their networks to discuss strategies. However, although Igbo women viewed the colonial state as a man, they soon learned the state was a different type of man that lacked the respect for their gendered strength. During the accepted ritual of "sitting on a man" and protesting, the British state confronted their gender norm by using violence and shooting thirty women. New gender roles were clearly defined, minimizing women's role in Nigeria and dismissing the traditional value of women in Igbo societies. Igbo women were left without their powerful associations and now subject to a patchwork of patriarchies of both colonial and Igbo men.

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Empowerment in Context: An Examination of Global Mamas

Emily Beaudoin

Author Biography

Emily Beaudoin '17 is a Gender Studies major with minors in International Development Studies and Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. She is from Ballston Spa, New York and President of the Notre Dames, a club on campus dedicated to raising awareness on issues that affect women. She is interested in global women's issues and has spent time exploring such issues in India, Jordan, Ghana, and Washington, DC. Emily enjoys hiking in the Adirondack Mountains and trying new food.

Introduction

In September 1995, member states at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women produced a Platform for Action that was declared "an agenda for women's empowerment." Empowerment of women, the Platform asserted, functions as a prerequisite to achieving political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental security among all peoples.[51] Today, carrying the allure of optimism and purpose, as well as considerable normative power, the empowerment discourse seems to have all but permeated the terrain of development policy.[52] In November 2015, for example, United Nations Development Program Administrator Helen Clark said in a speech, "The full empowerment of women and gender equality are the 'silver bullet' to achieve development goals."[53]

'Women's empowerment,' however, as used by international development organizations remains a 'fuzzy,' convoluted concept, and there remains a disconnect between the activities associated with the word 'empowerment' and its use in development

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[51]UN WOMEN, "The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Platform for Action," September 1995, accessed at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm#framework

[52] Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Overarching Concerns Programme Paper Number 10, "Beyond Buzzwords: 'Poverty Reduction,' 'Participation,' and 'Empowerment' in Development Policy," November 2005.

[53] "Gender Equality is a 'Silver Bullet' for Development: Helen Clark," UN Women: Asia and the Pacific, November 27, 2015, accessed at: http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2015/12/gender-equality-is-a-silver-bullet-for-development

discourse.[54] Empowerment is not a new concept—every society has local terms for autonomy, self-direction, self-confidence, and self-worth—but it remains to be understood how societies translate the way they speak of empowerment into development practice.[55]

This paper seeks to move away from understanding "empowerment" as a broad-based "silver-bullet" to a better tomorrow, towards a deeper understanding of what empowerment means to women situated in a specific socio-cultural context at a particular development organization. It asks the question: What does empowerment look like to the women who actually experience it?

First, a review of the literature will examine work that has already been done pertaining to women's empowerment in Ghana and in international development more broadly. Next, background information will be provided on the status of women in Ghana, the development landscape in Ghana, the structure of Global Mamas, the organization where the research was conducted, and the Fair Trade business model. An overview of the methods used to collect the data will be followed by an in-depth examination of the findings. In conclusion, there will be discussion of the practical implications of the findings and questions will be posed for future research.

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[54]This idea is found throughout these sources: Cornwall, Andrea 2014; Eyben, Rosalind and Rebecca Napier-Moore 2009; Godfred Odei Boateng et al. 2014; Narayan-Parker 2005. See bibliography.
[55]Deepa Narayan-Parker, *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, (World Bank Publications, 2005).

Literature Review

In the service of one-size-fits all development models, buzzwords like "empowerment" have taken on a nearly unimpeachable moral authority.[56] Yet, within the literature, there remains considerable diversity in the emphases, agendas, and terminology used to discuss empowerment. Despite the widespread agreement on the broad, conceptual definition of empowerment and the ensuing proliferation of empowerment rhetoric in the championing of global social interventions, the explicit connections between empowerment research and program development are, in most cases, tenuous.

Generally, development literature lacks empirical support for empowerment processes. Thus, the popularity and ambiguity of the term "empowerment" has created an intense need for assessment in the applied context. [57] Further, there is a need to measure empowerment in terms of women's own interpretations. Thus, those evaluating development organizations or programs must judge the process of empowerment as having occurred if it is self-assessed and validated by women themselves.[58]

Studies in Ghana show that the most dominant programmatic theme across agencies focused on women's empowerment is that

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[56] Cornwall and Brock, 2005.

[57] Shelly Grabe, "An Empirical Examination of Women's Empowerment and Transformative Change in the Context of International Development," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 49.1-2 (2012): 234.

[58] Malhotra, Anju, and Sidney Ruth Schuler, "Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development," *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (2005): 80

of economic empowerment.[59] Economic empowerment is typically associated with empowerment that seeks to ensure that individuals have the appropriate skills, capabilities, resources, and access to secure sustainable incomes and livelihoods.[60] Empowerment, however, should be conceived of in more than economic terms. A growing number of studies seek to develop indices for measuring empowerment and demonstrating the impact of specific interventions on women's empowerment. Much of the research on women's empowerment in Ghana has been aimed at assessing women's empowerment in light of Millennium Development Goal 3, evaluating government policy—including policies aimed at using information communication technology to empower rural women—and developing new policies that support the empowerment of women. By and large, the research fails to focus on women's lived experiences.[61]

It is useful to highlight the most widely used definition of empowerment in development literature, from social economist Naila Kabeer. Kabeer describes empowerment as "a process of change during which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability." Her definition hinges on three interrelated components—resources, agency, and

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[59] Anyidoho, Nana Akua, and Takyiwaa Manuh, "Discourses on Women's Empowerment in Ghana," *Development* 53.2 (2010): 267-273.

[60] Ibrahim, Solava, and Sabina Alkire, "Agency and Empowerment: A Proposal for Internationally Comparable Indicators," *Oxford Development Studies* 35.4 (2007): 379-403.

[61] Godfred Odei Boateng et al. 2014; Kwapong, Olivia, "Problems of Policy Formation and Implementation: The Case of ICT Use in Rural Women's Empowerment in Ghana," *International Journal of Education and Development Using ICT*, 2 (2007). 74

achievements—all of which she deems critical to conceptualizing empowerment.[62] Kabeer's conceptualization of empowerment, specifically its multiplicity of components, is key to my own assessment of empowerment at Global Mamas, a Fair Trade NGO that employs—and "empowers"—over 550 women across Ghana.

Background

The marginalization of women remains a very real problem in Ghana despite constitutional and other legislative provisions to protect and secure the rights of women. The inferior status of girls and women is significantly rooted in the practice of British colonials, whose Victorian values about girls encouraged the subordination of women. As such, women became restricted in their participation in economic, social, and political roles. Despite the post-independence government's efforts to remove these restrictions, deeply rooted social and gender divides remain.[63] Such divides are exemplified by the fact that the 2014 UNDP Human Development Report placed Ghana at #122 out of 149 countries listed in the Gender Inequality Index, which calculates gender-based inequality in reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Further, in comparison to 64% of their male counterparts, just 45% of adult women have attained at least a secondary level of education. Finally, despite the fact that women constitute 51% of Ghana's population, women hold only 10.9% of

[62] Naila, Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment," *Development and Change* 30.3 (1999): 435-464.
[63] African Development Fund, *Ghana Country Gender Profile* (2008).

all parliamentary seats in Ghana.[64] Ghana's recent status as a signatory to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women indicates a national commitment to ameliorating gender inequality, but it remains to be understood whether progress has been made at the organizational level.

Recognizing the numerous social and cultural barriers that make it uniquely difficult for Ghanaian women to succeed in business, two Peace Corps volunteers founded Global Mamas in 2003 under the name Women in Progress. The organization functioned as a non-profit with the mission to transform the lives of women entrepreneurs in Ghana by helping them to grow their businesses. The women Global Mamas employs, referred to as "Mamas," come to the organization trained in a craft, such as sewing, bead making, shea butter production, or batiking[65]. Global Mamas seeks to enhance these skills by providing training in quality improvement and creative design, among other things. Today, Global Mamas ships handmade jewelry, beauty products, and batik apparel to nearly 400 stores across the world and employs over 550 Ghanaian producers.[66] Though the organization is still run by US Americans, the founders hope that one day soon it will be Ghanaian run.

Separate from the Mamas, "Quality Control Champions" are another category of employees essential to the business. Referred

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[64] Make Every Woman Count, *African Women's Decade 2010-2020: 2014 Annual Review,* (2014) 87-89.
[65] Batiking is a method of producing colored designs on textiles by dying them, first having applied wax to the parts to be left un-dyed.
[66] "About Us," *Global Mamas*, accessed at: http://www.globalmamas.org/Info/aboutus

to as "the QC," these employees exist at all three Global Mamas production centers. Members of the QC are responsible for ensuring that each and every Global Mamas product that is exported is of high quality. QC responsibilities include meticulously checking individual stitches and ensuring fabric dyes are consistent. Members of the QC give feedback to the Mamas and tag and package products before shipment. The existence of the QC is a testament to Global Mamas' commitment to producing and exporting high quality items at all times.

Global Mamas' ability to create prosperity for women entrepreneurs in Ghana and empower their producers depends on their ability to provide customers with high-quality, fair trade products. Recently, the Leadership Team partnered with a group of Mamas at the Cape Coast office to explore the financial challenges faced by the company when seamstresses and batikers bring in products whose quality is insufficient for export. Previously, when Mamas produced a "less-than-perfect" product, they received a lower payment and the product was sold at a discount in the Global Mamas store in Accra, rather than exported to Europe or the US. However, the Mamas were still required to remake the product for export, and the growing surplus of low-quality products was having serious negative financial implications for the organization as a whole.

In the spirit of transparency, participation, and problem solving, Global Mamas asked for feedback from the Mamas themselves. Thus, the idea of "First Class, First Time" was born. The Mamas now have goals for delivering export-quality items. For example, seamstresses set a goal to produce 99.5% of their items

each month in the top class of quality, while batikers, with more quality challenges out of their control, set their goal at 90%. Every month the Mamas reach the goal, they receive a 10% bonus.

From its inception nearly 13 years ago, Global Mamas has operated under principles of Fair Trade. However, Global Mamas officially joined the Fair Trade Federation in 2005. An understanding of fair trade—a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency, and respect—is integral to understanding Global Mamas. Since the mid-20th century, the Fair Trade movement has sought to empower marginalized, small-scale producers and artisans in the international trading system. The Fair Trade movement emerged in the context of the post-World War Two political economy to promote "trade not aid," to demonstrate that, by changing the conditions and terms of international trade in the interests of small-scale producers in the South, the latter could become economically independent. The "Fair Trade Organization" (FTO) title distinguishes those organizations that demonstrate a "100% commitment to Fair Trade in all their business activities." The FTO mark requires FTOs to uphold an expansive set of Fair Trade principles that encompass all business activity. Examples of these principles include a commitment to transparency and accountability, gender equity and freedom of association, capacity building, and the payment of fair wages.[67] Global Mamas came to exist in its current form at the nexus of women's empowerment efforts in Ghana and the Fair Trade movement.

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[67] Anna Hutchens,"Empowering Women through Fair Trade? Lessons from Asia," *Third World Quarterly* 31.3 (2010): 449-67.

The question is, is Global Mamas "empowering" women in Ghana? If so, what does empowerment look like at Global Mamas? How do the women who work there experience it?

Methods

This research draws upon in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations at various Global Mamas locations in Ghana throughout June and July, 2016 to understand how Global Mamas empowers its producers. Most of the interviews and observations were conducted in Cape Coast, a small city on the southernmost shore of Central Region, Ghana, at either the Global Mamas office or local shops owned by the Mamas being interviewed. However, several of the interviews were conducted at the Global Mamas production centers in Ashaiman and Odumase Krobo. I also conducted one day of observation and informal interviews in Tamale, a large city in northern Ghana known for the production of shea butter. Interviewing and observing in alternate locations enabled me to better understand the implicit ways in which "empowerment" is prioritized, understood, and experienced at Global Mamas.

Thirty-five formal interviews were conducted with individuals associated with Global Mamas. Each individual interviewed is directly involved with Global Mamas as a QC champion, staff member, or a Mama, including both seamstresses and batikers. Of these 35 interviews, 3 members of the Cape Coast Leadership Team were interviewed, including the People Development Manager, Production Manager, and Quality Control Manager. The Leadership Team was interviewed in order to understand how those who are

in charge of Global Mamas understand empowerment. 15 of those interviewed were members of the QC, which included one "Papa," and 17 of the interviewees were Mamas. Thirty-one interviews were conducted in Cape Coast. One interview was conducted with a Mama in Odumase-Krobo, Global Mamas' bead production center, and three interviews were conducted with Mamas in Ashaiman, a sewing and batiking production center. The individuals interviewed had worked for Global Mamas for a wide range of time, from 4 months to 13 years.

Each interview was conducted one-on-one. Most interviews were conducted entirely in English. In a few cases, however, a translator was used. In these instances, the interpreter orally translated the questions to Fante, the local language in Cape Coast, and the subject's responses to English. The interviews took place in a quiet hallway in each office building or in an empty office. In this way, only the principal investigator heard the responses. The research also includes information gleaned from discussions with the two American founders of Global Mamas, who were at the Cape Coast office conducting their annual visit at the time the study was conducted. This includes both a formal interview conducted via telephone before arriving in Ghana and informal conversations conducted while the founders were in Ghana. Each interview was recorded on an iPhone with the permission of the respondent.

The ethnographic observations included formal observations of meetings that occurred at the Global Mamas office and informal observations of the day-to-day activities of the office. When I conducted formal observations, I generally sat in the back of the meeting room and took notes by hand. When observing the day-to-

day activities of the office, I sat at a desk in the Quality Control room with two American interns. I typically observed the QC at work, the Mamas dropping off their orders, the People Development Manager, who manages the Cape Coast office, conducting one on one meeting with the Mamas, and interactions between the Mamas and foreign staff/volunteers.

I randomly recruited respondents daily. Mamas were constantly coming and going out of the office to drop off their products and pick up their payment. When a Mama arrived at the office, the People Development Manager would briefly explain the topic of my research to her and then ask if she would be willing to be interviewed. On days when fewer Mamas were coming and going from the office, the People Development Manager sent me out into Cape Coast with a member of the QC who acted as both a guide and translator when needed. The interviews conducted outside the office took place in the individual shops of Mamas, oftentimes a building that doubled both as their home and their own shop. On these treks, I interviewed one Mama at each location. The combination of in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations enabled me to observe how Global Mamas seeks to empower women while also listening to the testimonies of those who are being empowered.

Findings

The findings highlight four interrelated components that comprise empowerment at Global Mamas: an enhanced skillset, including skills relating to product quality, technical functions, and design ability; an enhanced knowledge set, including global

awareness and health acumen; a sense of achievement; and a sense of agency, or the capability to decide when to speak out. Additionally, findings suggest that empowerment within Global Mamas is sustainable and long lasting. However, empowerment at Global Mamas is limited by factors outside of the control of the company, including matters of order frequency and pricing.

Skills

Skills acquisition functions as a critical component of empowerment at Global Mamas. When asked to name some skills they developed at Global Mamas, most respondents' skills fell into the categories of "quality," "technical," and "design." It should be noted that many respondents mentioned a combination of these skills.

An emphasis on quality was repeated time and time again by those interviewed, presumably due to Global Mama's recent emphasis on "First Class, First Time," as discussed in the Background section of this paper. "I produce quality goods, they want quality and the design. The quality is very important," said one Mama, a batiker since 2007. "I have learned how you can make a nice dress, a more quality dress," stated another Mama, a seamstress. "I have learned to produce quality goods. They want quality and design. The quality is very important," mentioned another. Others simply said they pay more attention to "checking quality," "quality work," "quality production," and "quality control."

Design-related skills are another important component of empowerment at Global Mamas. Mamas mentioned acquiring both batiking and sewing skills. Specifically, these skills include new

stenciling techniques and use of batik stamps, and the ability to sew more quickly and with smaller stitches. One Mama, in her tenth year with the organization, proudly proclaimed that Global Mamas had "sharpened [her] creativity."

"[I learned] how to sew neater," said one of the seamstresses. "They taught me how to sew the A-line dress. I learned new designs like the reversible baby dress," the seamstress said, speaking of various Global Mamas dress patterns that she did not previously know how to sew, despite her sewing expertise. One Mama, who had been working at Global Mamas since they opened in 2003, noted the importance of what she learned in college and the ways in which her time at Global Mamas had built on her existing expertise:

> "[My college] taught us in school, how to make [batik], how to print it, how to dye it. But when I joined Global Mamas I learned a lot. The design that some countries like, and the colors too that some countries also like. So, I learned all these things from them. Then, the stamping too…the animals and stamping too."

Thus, Global Mamas prioritizes building the capacity of their employees, many of whom are already highly trained in their craft. This capacity building also includes technical skills, which include keyboard and computer skills, the ability to manage and understand Excel spreadsheets, the ability to properly use a tape measure, and general managerial work such as bookkeeping and accounting. The acquisition of skills, including those relating to quality, design, and technical abilities, are an important component of empowerment at Global Mamas. The importance of an enhanced

skillset is perhaps best encapsulated by one of the first seamstresses to work at Global Mamas, who said, "I have learned quality … [I learned] how to do your best, [and] how to not disappoint. So, I have learned so many things." Other skills mentioned fall into another category that I conceptualize as an enhanced knowledge set.

Enhanced Knowledge Set

At Global Mamas, an enhanced knowledge set includes a global outlook and an improved understanding of health care and health-related topics. Producers and members of the QC alike reported the expansion of their worldview as a direct result of their involvement at Global Mamas. Since 2003, hundreds of volunteers and interns have worked with Global Mamas. Each time a new volunteer arrives, various members of the QC bring them on a tour of the city where the production center is located, showing them where to purchase food, toiletries, and souvenirs. One member of the QC who gives these tours responded:

> "I've learned more about, because of the tour, I engage in conversations with the interns who I have the chance to know more about the people from outside of Ghana. And, you know, different cultures and how they are…I love working here. I learn more here, I get a chance to meet new people, know more things about them, a different side of life. If I should put it that way."

In addition to becoming familiar with other cultures, Mamas and members of the QC expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn global fashion trends. "[I learned] the design that some

countries like, and the colors too that some countries also like," one batiker stated. For example, while Ghanaian fashion oftentimes features bright colors and bold shapes, Western fashion may feature simple patterns such as small polka dots and lines and more subdued colors. Other respondents echoed this sentiment. "Working at Global Mamas now has given me the opportunity to know the world markets, in terms of fashion," said the technical designer. "The investigating we are doing, trend research, I am now seeing it in full action."

In addition to acquiring a more global outlook, Mamas and members of the QC expressed increased expertise relating to health and healthcare due to the workshops Global Mamas delivers. One of the seamstresses stated, "I think I have learned a lot of things, especially with medical [information sessions] that [have] been conducted for us. Sometimes they invite the doctor, and they talk about diabetes and family planning, and we learned it all here." Similarly, a member of the QC praised Global Mamas for the health information they provide, including screenings for certain types of cancer and diabetes. "I have one thing I am proud of [Global Mamas]," she said. "Most of the time they do workshops for us, especially health screening that is very good. Including cervical cancer and stuff and then recently they they tested us on sugar."

The question remains, how have these new skills and knowledge sets impacted the ways in which the women perceive themselves? What has resulted from these new skills and understandings? Many respondents noted that new skills translated to a tangible sense of achievement, the next component of empowerment at Global Mamas.

Achievement

Each respondent was asked, "Tell me about a time you have felt really proud since joining Global Mamas." This question allowed participants to speak openly of a time they felt deep satisfaction as a result of their own achievements. Someone mentioned the simple pleasure of being able to buy their own "knitting machine," while another expressed great pride in being trusted to "handle the database alone." For many, pride came from being constantly busy. To be busy at Global Mamas is to receive many orders. To receive many orders at Global Mamas means that your product—indeed, your skills—are in high demand.

Two respondents felt very proud when they were promoted from part-time positions to full-time. At Global Mamas, working "part-time" means that the worker is essentially on call, traveling to the office and performing tasks here and there when needed. Another point of pride that many Mamas mentioned was "completing work without getting fixing." In other words, it is a great source of pride to hand in work that is "First Class, First Time."

Six of the respondents explicitly mentioned feeling proud for being able to use their money to send their children or siblings to school. One seamstress, who has been working at Global Mamas since it opened, explained the following:

> "Yes, I felt very proud because I feel like I am working
> and receive my money so I can do something, help my
> children, they are in school. My husband is helping, but
> me too! So, I feel proud about it. And, I am always
> happy about it since I joined Global Mamas."

Another Mama stated, "I was able to purchase [my own sewing machine] and to contribute a little from Global Mamas and from my own shop money to take my child to invest in school." Other Mamas expressed deep satisfaction in being able to pay for their own housing. "I rented my own apartment," said one woman. "Global Mamas taught me how to rent my own apartment," replied another. A member of the QC, already able to finance her apartment, was able to use her Global Mamas salary to improve the apartment.

> "When I rented my own apartment. I, first of all, started saving before entering Global Mamas. So, after getting the money to rent the apartment, then I got the opportunity to be at Global Mamas. So, with the money I collected [from Global Mamas] I could create my room and buy little things for my room and take care of myself."

Another proud moment for some of the Mamas included winning the Annual Design Competition or Global Mama of the Year. Held once a year, the Design Competition gives the Mamas a chance to design a new batik pattern, apparel item, or accessory. As a prize, the winning design and batik pattern are sold at the Global Mamas store in Accra and a monetary prize is given. Global Mama of the Year, also an annual competition, recognizes select Mamas for their dedication to the organization, product quality, and general dependability. One Mama interviewed had accomplished both of these feats, winning the Annual Design Competition by designing a short sleeve shirt for Global Mamas' collection. She was later being named Global Mama of the Year:

> "Ok, I worked on, I produced it and I was so proud of it. It was a design and then I printed it off. I worked on it. I was so proud. And then, I had Global Mama of the Year! I had so many prizes before, but, only this time because of my work."

Ranging from their pride in producing quality products and being "First Class, First Time," to their ability to send their children to school, purchase their own equipment, and win company recognition, the respondents reported a deep sense of pride in their own achievements. This sense of achievement and pride in one's self and one's abilities contributed to these women's ultimate sense of agency, or their ability to take ownership of their own decisions.

Agency

The question of agency, the ability to make one's own decisions freely, was examined through different questions of the interview and focused predominantly on understanding a woman's ability to decide to speak her mind. Many women mentioned their confidence to speak up at meetings that occurred at the office. One female QC Champion, asked to discuss a time when she argued or challenged Global Mamas, responded:

> "Yes! Even this week, we had a meeting and we did bring up, all about bonuses. About the end of the year, because they said they are. Because they are owing [us money]. So they can't give us bonuses but it has been now three years."

Another Mama, a seamstress, stated, "Oh, I always speak my mind. When there is something going wrong that I don't like I just solve it. I am open. I tell them what I feel I should tell them, it doesn't matter the business." Similarly, when asked to describe a time she spoke her mind or acted boldly, a batiker replied, "When we have meetings and I know that this will not work well, I say it, I speak out."

A few of the respondents implied that their decision to speak up, in meetings or in general, was determined by whether or not they had previously brought an issue to Global Mamas' attention, and whether or not it was addressed adequately. Women expressed feeling discouraged from mentioning a problem a second time. As stated by one of the QC champions:

> "I always do that whenever they are having a meeting but they won't mind, they always do what they want, but if we tell them, they won't take it so we stop talking about it because when you say it they won't put it to work."

One of the original Mamas, who mentioned frequently speaking out against the "weighing system," or the system that determines the weight of the goods they produced, said "when I speak about [the weighing system] they didn't do anything about it, so I just leave it."

Still, other women acknowledged that, at times, the meetings are not conducive to resolving all of their problems and concerns. Yet, they are still effective spaces to speak out, as the following quotes demonstrate.

> "Ok, normally when we are having meetings, sometimes we feel we should let things go as it is. But

sometimes you have to speak out, if you feel in your faith you will speak out. Sometimes, ok, sometime ago they rejected and the rejection came in, and I spoke out. Sometimes it doesn't favor us."

"During meetings they ask whether you have something to say. So, if you have any challenges that you are facing then you can just yell it out. Then, it is good. If they have an answer, they will give it to you."

Other Mamas expressed confidence and comfort in speaking one-on-one to the People Development Manager, instead of in group meetings, as evidenced here:

"One thing is personally I like one on one questions. If there is something troubling my mind, something on my mind, I just come to [the People Development Manager]. I put the question on the table and she will explain it to me. So then, I will understand it and there is no need for argument."

The informational meeting for the Annual Design Competition demonstrated the agency and ability of Global Mamas employees to speak up in the face of something they find problematic. The meeting was run by two American volunteers and meant to inform the Mamas of the rules of the 2016 Competition. The volunteers prepared a PowerPoint presentation with colorful graphics, and gave their presentation in English with great enthusiasm. When the presentation ended, and they asked if anyone had questions, the women in attendance erupted in a storm of Fante, clearly unhappy.

With great confusion, the American volunteers asked for a translation. As one of the staff members translated, the questions

and concerns became clear. Many Mamas felt the Design Competition to be a waste of their time and resources, as they had to take a break from their orders that they were being paid to produce to create a submission using their own fabrics and dyes. Further, in the past, Mamas other than the one who had submitted the design and won the competition typically were allowed to produce the design. Thus, not only did each Mama have to use her own time and resources to design a submission, but it was not guaranteed that she would be chosen to produce the product if she won. Mamas were extremely vocal about this matter. Thus, despite the way in which the competition was presented as an exciting opportunity, the Mamas exercised their agency to tell Global Mamas that they were dissatisfied.

Sustainability

Empowerment at Global Mamas includes enhanced skill and knowledge sets, a sense of achievement, and the agency necessary to make their opinions heard. This empowerment is sustainable, as well. In other words, not only are the staff and employees of Global Mamas empowered, but they are empowered to thrive and to succeed even without Global Mamas.

For example, the Cape Coast technical designer remarked, "...even if tomorrow I am not at Global Mamas, I know how to start, where to start, if I had to be on my own." Another Mama, exclaimed, "They help me to develop my company, they help me to do my job." A seasoned batiker, who has worked at Global Mamas since 2006, elaborated on these sentiments:

"What I will say is that Global Mamas is helping us and,

in a way, we are helping each other. They are helping us and they are also helping the group to grow. Yes, which I like about them. They organize workshops and everything which helps us. They give us the ins and outs of everything so that we can develop and improve upon our work."

The women of Global Mamas are mentored and supported not only in developing their own small businesses, but also in different aspects of their lives. Thus, even if Global Mamas were to close, the Mamas have established solid skill sets and knowledge sets, pride in themselves and in their work, and the confidence and ability to speak their minds. Empowerment at Global Mamas, the findings indicate, is long-lasting and sustainable. There are, however, certain limitations on empowerment at Global Mamas.

Limitations of Empowerment

Comments on payments, bonuses, and lack of certain services demonstrated limitations, or perceived limitations, on empowerment at Global Mamas. A member of the QC said, "Around Christmas time, they have canceled bonuses so they have stopped doing that. They didn't mind us." Prompted at the end of the interview to add anything they would like to, one Mama responded, "The price, they have to increase our prices for us. The price for what we are sewing…Anything we bring it up [at the meetings], all of us, we always complain about our prices…they explain that they can't do anything about it." Another seamstress reiterated this call for increased prices:

"The only problem is the money for each dress. That is

the only challenge…I will always tell them to add a little to what they are giving us, but they do not fix the problem, not the way you want. Because they will ask you the new price and after that they will say they won't pay you the one that you said. They will pay you their own."

A seamstress echoed calls for increased pay:

"What I want to say is that I learn, I am here three or four years now, and the job is good. So maybe, if they can help us more to have more money or financials so that we can have more money and establish ourselves financially because we are not, a lot of people will come in and afterwards maybe we will be going in and we need to establish ourselves."

Another Mama stated, "My experience is that, nowadays, the work is not coming like it used to. I am, I don't know. Global Mamas has to spread and go to some places in Ghana here." One seamstress recounted her frustration with how Global Mamas assigns orders:

"At times, you will be assigned to one order. And, I do bloomers. A lot of them are my products, I designed them. So, you will have an order but when you come, they will switch it and they will tell you that your order is not ready or there is no order. Plus, you will see that your order has been given to somebody. So, and they will tell you that that person doesn't have anything to do, and that's why they gave it to them. But, they should not. Point blank they need to be fair to everyone here."

Other Mamas expressed a need for more orders. One of the seamstresses said, "I need more orders. Everyday I want to be busy. I want to be busy always." One of her colleagues, another seamstress, repeated this call:

> "You have to give us more orders. And, if someone
> is doing orders and you don't want the person to
> do it again, you have to explain to the person that
> this is their fault, that is why we did not give the
> work again. But, you will see a different person is
> doing it. I want you to tell them."

In other words, if a Mama is working on a particular pattern and Global Mamas is dissatisfied with her work, Global Mamas should explain their dissaproval, rather than transferring the order to another Mama. In this way, the Mama at hand has an opportunity to fix her work and keep her orders. A call for more orders was restated by one of seamstresses:

> "Hmmm, ok. My experience, I am proud to be a Global
> Mama. I am proud to be a Global Mama, but right now
> we are not getting the things that we need. So that's
> why everything that we achieved some time ago, there
> are no more orders coming for us to sew. So, we are
> praying that Global Mamas is staying straight so we
> can get more orders to do so that it will grow big again
> to satisfy everyone. If you have a problem you can sit
> down and discuss it deeply to discuss if it is right for
> you or other Mamas."

Informal conversations with the American co-founders shed some light on why the Mamas frequently reported having less

orders, as well as canceled Christmas bonuses. In 2013, West Africa experienced the most widespread outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in history, causing major loss of life in the region, primarily in the countries of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Though Ebola did not reach Ghana, the economic effects of the disease did. In 2013, the co-founders explained, Global Mamas began to experience not only a decrease in foreign volunteers willing to spend time in Ghana, but also a decrease in foreign consumers ordering products from West Africa. In order to continue paying a living wage throughout the year, Global Mamas canceled Christmas bonuses, a decision that was not made lightly. Three years later, Global Mamas still has not recovered from the economic impact of Ebola, failing to receive the number of orders they received prior to 2013. Thus, the Ebola outbreak may explain, in part, the array of responses pertaining to a lack of orders, as well as the cancellation of Christmas bonuses.

In addition to more orders, another staff member called for greater scheduling "flexibility" in order to "empower the staff to do extra." She asserted that allowing for more flexibility in scheduling hours would enable the staff to have more time to attend school.

> "I also asked if there was an opportunity for the staff to do extra. I had my degree when I was still working. I didn't stop working and go to have my degree. There should be an opportunity like that. Most of them are very young. So that shouldn't lose their jobs, but Global Mamas should meet staff halfway. Not pay for school, no. But making times flexible for staff to be able to take classes and to upgrade."

Thus, although women in Global Mamas are empowered in many ways, they are also constrained. The most notable constraints involve the financial decisions of the company and the orders that come in—or don't come in—from around the world. In spite of these limitations, Global Mamas women are empowered with an enhanced skillset, including skills relating to product quality, technical functions, and design ability; an enhanced knowledge set, including global awareness and health acumen; a sense of achievement; and the agency or the capability to decide when to speak out.

Discussion of the Results

The findings indicate that women who work at Global Mamas are empowered. Empowerment, as defined and experienced at Global Mamas, includes an enhanced skillset and knowledge set, a sense of achievement, and the agency to speak one's mind. Each of these components is sustainable, but can be constrained by factors beyond the control of Global Mamas. While the data suggests that all of these components comprise empowerment at Global Mamas, the claim cannot be made that each employee experiences each component. At the same time, the claim cannot be made that all of the employees experience any single component, as respondents sometimes chose not answer all of the questions and the answers received were oftentimes unclear or very broad.

The capacity building exercises and business development mentoring provided by Global Mamas contributes to the sustainable development of the region. As previously stated, Global Mamas employs a little under 600 women across Ghana. Many of

the respondents reported being able to send their children or their siblings to school, knowing how to develop their own small businesses, and understanding their own health more comprehensively as a direct result of their involvement with Global Mamas. With regard to the children of Global Mamas employees, their families, and the communities of Cape Coast, Krobo, and Ashaiman, as well as Ghana more broadly, the findings suggest that Global Mamas has profoundly contributed to the sustainable development of Ghana.

Group meetings and one-on-one meetings facilitate and support empowerment at Global Mamas. The evidence indicates that meetings, both group and one-on-one, are key locations for the staff to voice their concerns and share their opinions with the Leadership Team, the co-founders, and their fellow colleagues. Regardless of whether or not the problem at hand can be solved, the responses suggest that the employees of Global Mamas are comfortable and confident sharing their opinion. Sometimes, however, the respondents indicated that they knew their issue would not be resolved and, thus, made the choice not to bring it up in a meeting. Many times, these issues, including issues of payments and lack of orders, were a direct result of various external factors beyond the control of Global Mamas.

These external factors, at times, limit and constrain empowerment at Global Mamas. While the Mamas and other staff members feel they can speak up to a large extent regarding various aspects of the business, including ways to improve quality and what workshops should be delivered, payment is out of their control. This makes sense, as the number of orders given to each

woman depends on the number of orders placed by international buyers. As demonstrated by the impact that the Ebola crisis had on Global Mamas, the issue of orders is, oftentimes, out of the control of even the two co-founders.

Predicated on and supported by group meetings and one-on-one meetings, empowerment at Global Mamas emphasizes an enhanced skill set, knowledge set, achievements, pride, and agency. It is important to acknowledge the limitations on empowerment at Global Mamas, as evidenced by the numerous frustrations expressed. The findings indicate room for future research related to empowerment processes and experiences at Global Mamas.

Directions for Future Research

The conceptualization of empowerment provided will enable Global Mamas to measure empowerment in a much more concrete way than ever before. Several of my interview questions are currently being incorporated into Global Mamas annual report surveys, in which each Mama is interviewed about her annual experiences at Global Mamas. These surveys seek to gauge empowerment of the employees over the course of each year. My understanding of empowerment at Global Mamas adds a new and innovative dimension to this measurement. Further, portions of my interviews and field notes will be incorporated into various Global Mamas publications and social media posts. This research will supplement publications made available to potential volunteers and donors, as well as potential consumers. This immediate, practical impact of my study could be multiplied by further research.

While the research focused exclusively on empowerment at Global Mamas, it cannot be said that every aspect of a woman's embodied empowerment is a result of Global Mamas. There are a multitude of other factors that ought to be explored if we are to understand the lived experience of empowerment in total clarity. How do factors such as education, upbringing, and family relationships impact a woman's overall empowerment? Future research should explore what portion or percentage of a women's empowerment is due to her employment at Global Mamas and what percentage of her empowerment is due to external socio-cultural factors. A comparative study that examines women affiliated with Global Mamas in contrast to non-affiliated Ghanaian women who own their own small businesses may illuminate more specific ways in which Global Mamas contributes to women's empowerment.

Another area that warrants further research is the way in which Global Mamas employees have changed, developed, and progressed over time. The findings indicate the ways in which the Mamas perceived empowerment on the day they were interviewed. The question remains: how have the women who work at Global Mamas changed over time? How "empowered" was "Mama A" before she started working with Global Mamas? In what ways, if at all, has her personality, her demeanor, or her confidence changed since she began work with Global Mamas? An interesting and illuminative future study may seek to understand the Mamas and their experiences with empowerment more holistically by interviewing their relatives and close friends.

Conclusion

Understanding empowerment at Global Mamas enables one to move away from understanding "empowerment" as a buzzword in international development toward an understanding of what empowerment means to women in a specific socio-cultural context at a particular development organization. The findings indicate that empowerment at Global Mamas is multifaceted and complex, comprised of the following: an enhanced skillset, including skills relating to product quality, technical functions, and design ability; an enhanced knowledge set, including global awareness and health acumen; a sense of achievement; and a sense of agency, or the capability to decide when to speak out. This empowerment is constrained only by factors beyond the control of Global Mamas, including the Ebola crisis, which negatively impacted the economy of much of West Africa.

Global Mamas empowers its employees in work and in various aspects of life. The findings suggest that, by empowering their employees, Global Mamas may have had an impact on the development of Ghana. Moving forward, Global Mamas may consider exploring the ways in which their employees have changed over time, as well as the ways in which their employees embody empowerment in comparison to women in the local community who own small businesses but do not engage with Global Mamas. Now entering into their fourteenth year of business, Global Mamas stands ready to continue to empower Ghanaian women for years to come.

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