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“I’ve Taken My Own Power”: Insights into women’s empowerment and its effectiveness in different NGOs in Cape Town

Molly Willeford
SIT Study Abroad

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“I’ve Taken My Own Power”:
Insights into women’s empowerment and its effectiveness in different NGOs in Cape Town

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights, SIT Study Abroad, a program for World Learning

Cape Town, South Africa

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my Independent Study Project to my South African families. I could not have been as successful during my time here without the love and warmth you showed me. Thank you to my beautiful Langa mama who showed me great hospitality and nothing but kindness. You have seen so much ugly in the world, but you live day to day with such a beautiful and inspiring heart. Thank you to my wonderful Tshabo mama who taught me the very definition of humility. You treated me like a daughter and cared for me like I was one of your own. Thank you to my amazing Stellenbosch family who taught me the beauty of faith. I wish you all the luck and happiness in the world as you await the birth of your first child. Thank you to my inspirational Bo Kaap family who welcomed me into their home as though I had always belonged there. You all reminded me so much of my family back in the United States, and I am so grateful to have been treated like a sister by my brothers in Bo Kaap. Without the love and support of my families, I would not be able to call South Africa my second home. I am so fortunate and blessed to call each of you a part of my extended family; your generosity and warmth speaks volumes to me and I cannot thank you enough.

“How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” – A.A. Milne

Abstract

The research outlined in this study examines different views on women's empowerment in Cape Town, South Africa. Although a new Constitution and a new democracy promises equal opportunities for men and women, vast inequalities can still be seen throughout most of the country, with the city of Cape Town being no exception. There are numerous non-government organizations in Cape Town, most working towards what they call "the empowerment of South African women." But what does empowerment mean for the workers and volunteers within these NGOs? The three participants in this study all belong to different organizations in the Cape Town area, therefore offering a variety of perspectives of women's empowerment. Interviews were used to gather the information needed for this study, and sampled were women from different walks of life as well as belonging to different organizations. From these interviews, I was able to understand what exactly women's empowerment means in South Africa and why a need for it exists as well. My findings and conclusions of my study suggest that while the Constitution of the new South Africa demands equality for all genders, South Africa actually falls short of this goal. The NGOs sampled in this study find that there exists now more than ever a need for empowerment due to rising numbers of sexual violence and vast economic inequalities. Also, it was found that the government does need seem to be providing the adequate resources for the funding of women's empowerment. The legislation exists, but the implementation is not there. The findings of this study also show that women need various types of empowerment, as well as men need to be educated in the field of women's empowerment in order to effect real change. This research hopes to provide insight into the complexities of women's empowerment and how it functions in Cape Town today.

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I would like to thank everyone who helped me with this project, and there are a number of you. Firstly, I would like to thank the participants of my study who allowed me to interview them – without you, this project would not exist. Thank you for opening up to me about your lives and thoughts and feelings. It was wonderful to talk to each of you about your personal experiences, and I gained so much valuable insight from the conversations that we had. I hope this study can shed some light on the issues we talked about and spark conversations regarding positive change. Without you, this project would not exist.

I would also like to thank my parents back in the United States. They believed in me and encouraged me always to pursue my deepest dreams, hence why I am studying in Cape Town this semester. Because of their love and support, I feel confident enough to take on anything – including a month long independent study project. Thank you for your love and ability to be available for a Skype call at any notice.

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Lastly, thank you to Stewart and Tabisa for organizing one of the best and most challenging semesters of my life. Thank you for all that you do for the students of SIT; thank you for your endless encouragement as we navigated through this semester together. I'd also like to thank the twenty-one students I've spent the last three and a half months with. We grew together in unbelievable ways, and I am so fortunate to have experienced Cape Town, South Africa with an incredible group of individuals.

Introduction

In 1994, as South Africa held its first ever democratic elections, one group of people in the country hoped these elections would bring about much better circumstances. This group was the women of South Africa. When the late, former first president of the new South Africa, Nelson Mandela, said during his inaugural address, “Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression... unless we see in visible and practical terms that the condition of the women of our country has radically changed for the better and that they have been empowered to intervene in all aspects of life as equals” (Mandela, 1994). President Mandela spoke of a new South Africa, in which all women would feel empowered about their status as women in the new democratic country. Yet now, nearly twenty-one years after apartheid ended, women still do not have the resources necessary to feel empowered by the terms of Mandela’s address in 1994. South Africa continues to have one of the highest rates of sexual assault and unemployment in the world. Across the country, a majority of unemployed people are women. Women are one the most important resources to the country, being as they are half of the population and can help better the country and communities in which they live in numerous ways, yet a large majority of women still have yet to reach their full potential as South African citizens. Clearly, a need for women’s empowerment exists in this country.

The word empowerment remains ambiguous to many South Africans, even today. As Edgar Pieterse writes, “Empowerment is a self-evident good that no one in his or her right mind could be against. It is a moral no-brainer. Yet, it is almost impossible to find people who can actually define what they mean by empowerment” (2008). When people speak or think of empowerment, oftentimes they are referring to economic empowerment, which is clearly an

important issue to the people of South Africa. But are there other kinds of empowerment? The kind that will be explored in this research is empowerment of will be that of education of one's rights as a woman of South Africa. There are several organizations that work tirelessly to help affirm women in this country; their work cannot go by unheard.

Each year since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) releases a report on Human Development in the countries recognized by the United Nations. In the most recent report, the year 2014, South Africa ranks 118th in the world with regards to the Human Development Index (HDI). HDI, according to the UNDP, is “a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living” (Malik, 2014). From these categories, development and be measured and it can be determined what countries need help in which categories. From the measurements taken by the HDI, gender inequality is also measured on the Gender Inequality Index. This number is determined off of three factors, reproductive health, the labor market, and empowerment (Malik, 2014). South Africa, with regards to empowerment according to the Gender Inequality Index, has, as of 2013, 41% of its parliamentary seats held by women; yet, of the population in the country of women, aged 25 or older, 72% of them have some secondary education, while 76% of males, aged 25 or older, have some secondary education. The adolescent birth rate for women aged 15-19 is 51%; the labor force participation rate, as of 2012, for females is 44% and for males is 60% (Malik, 2014). Given these figures alone, it is obvious to see the massive inequalities between men and women in South Africa. With these inequalities, though, is it possible to raise women out of a seemingly impossible gap to become equals with the men?

Cape Town, South Africa is the second largest and oldest city in South Africa, providing a wide range of people from all walks of life. Interestingly, more than half of Cape Town's population is female, yet only 38% of households are managed by a woman (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Unemployment is at 24%, with nearly half of those considered unemployed being women (Statistics South Africa, 2011). My own observations have yielded that more women in Cape Town are homeless or on the streets, and I have seen many women's shelters and crisis centers, indicating a need for these services is quite large.

My objectives in conducting research on women's empowerment are to explore the different ways offered by organizations and the government to empower women in Cape Town specifically; to compare the definitions of empowerment and why women exactly need to be empowered in Cape Town; and to identify why a need for women's empowerment exists in South Africa, given the progressive new Constitution ensuring the rights of all citizens. To begin my research, I will look at various pieces of literature on women's empowerment and affirmation groups and strategies that exist in South Africa. I will also look at different pieces of legislation put forth by the South African government in terms of women's empowerment, and whether or not they have been effective. Next, I will explain my methodology for conducting my research, present my findings gathered from the three interviews of members of non-government organizations (NGOs). I will then connect my findings from the interviews to the information I obtained from the literature at hand. Then I will end my research by looking at women's empowerment as a whole in South Africa and offering suggestions for further study on the topic as well.

As previously mentioned, I conducted my interviews and research with women who are in positions of authority in different NGOs in Cape Town, choosing to focus on one of the many

methods dedicated to empowering women in South Africa. The main research question I asked throughout my study hopes to explain why there needs to be a greater push for women's empowerment in South Africa and how different groups are promoting empowerment. My initial hypothesis was that women need to be empowered because they need to understand their rights fully in the framework of the South African Constitution, and a gap may exist between the government and the citizens. And through my research, I found that the three interviews I conducted had varying ideas of what kinds of empowerment need to be implemented in South African society, but also definitions of what empowerment means vary from person to person as well.

Limitations

The limitations I experienced during my study were mainly due to the limited time frame, the structure of my study (interview-based), my recent introduction to interviewing, and how I identify as a white American woman. Because of the four week time frame of this study, I found that I was unable to interview a large number of members from different organizations in order to paint a bigger picture of what women's empowerment is like in South Africa. Instead, I chose to focus on a few organizations to narrow my topic. I also interviewed two women who were both members of the same organization at one point, thus limiting my findings and skewing my data slightly to the effects of this one organization. This was my first time performing in-depth interviews with participants for a study, so at times I am sure I appeared nervous or shy to my interviewees. But despite being nervous, I feel that my interviews still went very well, and I was able to draw many different and fascinating conclusions from these interviews and incorporate them into academic theories. My identity as an American woman may have felt threatening or intimidating. As a Westerner, it was difficult at times for me to not bring in my preconceived notions of the "other." I also realize that by choosing only to focus on women in NGOs is in itself a limitation, given the huge numbers of men employees in non-government organizations in Cape Town. My conclusions to this study are based solely on the experiences of those members of the organizations I interviewed, and these experiences are not meant to generalize the whole of women's empowerment in South Africa.

Literature Review

As many know, after 1994, South Africa was a new democratic nation, promising freedom and civil rights for citizens who had suffered vast inequalities under apartheid. But where did the women fall in terms of equality? The new constitution promised equality for women and protection of these rights under the law, but the literature written on women during apartheid suggests that women are not receiving the full benefits and protection that is guaranteed under the constitution. While women are supposedly promised equality with men in South Africa, reality proves that this is not the case. Women's empowerment comes as a response to this issue, and the literature explains a need for empowerment in today's society.

Women's Movements during Apartheid:

The need for women's empowerment begins much earlier than apartheid in South Africa, but the terrors of apartheid brought together women from all walks of life to mobilize and demand an end to this oppressive regime. Noting women's ability to mobilize and demand action is important for understanding why women need empowerment in South Africa: by mobilizing and coming together to form a women's movement, it shows a need for change. Oftentimes women are ignored or left out all together from the history books when movements are analyzed. It is generally thought that women are passive, that women sit idly by and wait for change to happen – this can be because women, true in South Africa, were barred from positions of political power so that it can be easy to overlook the contributions from women during apartheid (Walker, 1991). It can be also considered heroic to look at the scores of women involved in the struggle against apartheid – at the time, women were barred from most political institutions and were denied from political participation. This inequality helped ignite a spark

that encouraged women to mobilize to demand change and an end to the oppressive systems of apartheid (Möller, 2010). And the fact that many women are still mobilized for change shows that much improvement needs to happen before equality is fully reached.

It should be noted, however, that the women who mobilized during apartheid did not come together only because they were all women. Women come together to fight all kinds of issues, whether as women of different backgrounds, races, professions or whatever. Women do not assemble for a single reason (Hassim, 2006). That being said, however, it is also true that women had a difficult time finding their sense of agency; until about the mid-1980s, women split into fractions of different groups that allowed for women from different walks of life to exist and work in different spaces. While the ends of the struggle were ultimately the destruction of apartheid, women went about achieving this end in different ways as per their different spheres in South Africa's society (Hassim, 2006).

One thing that can be inferred from the women of the apartheid area is that they knew how to reach across the divides of race and income. One way this was accomplished was through establishing a "motherist" approach: women appealed to authority by using their status as mothers. This was seen mostly in the opposition to pass laws in the 1950s. Women protested against these laws by saying that their role as mothers could not be fulfilled because they were denied entrance in certain spaces (Britton & Fish, 2009). In this way, women of all racial backgrounds could come together as mothers to demand change. Protesting as mothers also allowed these women to take issues from the private sphere and bring them forth into the public sphere, thus giving them a more respected and legitimate role in the eyes of many male leaders throughout the country (Britton & Fish, 2009).

As a result of the inequalities of apartheid, and since different women were treated very differently under apartheid, different groups broke into different women's organization to mobilize for the ending of apartheid. Most famously among these groups was the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL). The ANCWL was formed in 1948 and came about because women were denied membership into the ANC for a long period of time. This organization is often referred to as "the" women's movement, and it is also said that the ANCWL is the only true voice of South African women (Hassim, 2014). This however was difficult to say that since so many women's organization came about during apartheid. Some of these organizations included the Federation of South African Women (FSAW), which began in 1954 and tried to unite women from various other women's groups around South Africa. FSAW specifically highlighted the tensions across women's organizations. It was difficult women to all come together of different races because during apartheid, women were all made very aware of the differences they faced (Britton & Fish, 2009).

Other women's organizations that formed in the later years of apartheid were, most notably, the United Democratic Front (UDF). The UDF was started in 1983 and was created to bring together many different organizations that existed for women, like FSAW, but with the intention of forging a democratic front during the particularly violent times of apartheid. In the beginning year of this umbrella organization, 1983, the UDF brought in over 400 civic, religious, youth, women, and labor organizations to band together for democracy. Two years later, in 1985, UDF had almost three million members with about 700 affiliated organizations as well (Britton & Fish, 2009).

Aside from ANCWL, FSAW, and UDF, there were numerous other national and regional organizations dedicated to challenging the foundations of apartheid through demanding change

with regards to class, race, and gender issues. Some of these organizations include the Black Women's Federation, Rape Crisis, United Women's Organization, and Women Against Repression, and many of which even exist today. Some of these organizations, however, refused to associate themselves with UDF on the grounds that, as women, they wanted to demand respect as political leaders. They also felt that many of the organizations belonging to UDF were labeled as "caterers" to the apartheid state, claiming that none of these organizations served to eliminate gender inequality and only focused on the dismantling of apartheid (Britton & Fish, 2009). These deep divisions in women's organizations highlight the deep divisions felt by the people of South Africa during apartheid.

Even in exile, women still worked together to demand change from the apartheid regime. Many people and organizations were banned and sent into exile during apartheid for opposition to the state. Those who wanted gender equality and an end to apartheid worked to create the Women's National Coalition (WNC), which was formalized in 1992. This coalition brought together ninety different women's organizations, women's branches of political parties, civic organizations, youth organizations, and religious organizations (Britton & Fish, 2009). These different groups worked from exile to call for the end of apartheid.

It is clear to see how different organizations of women came together, or worked against each other, for the end of apartheid. Eventually, their efforts paid off in 1994 with the first democratic elections in South Africa, bringing about the end of an oppressive regime.

Women's Rights in the South African Constitution:

With the fall of apartheid, changes were obviously necessary to help move the country away from oppression. This called for not only democratic elections for a president, but a totally

new constitution as well. Members of Parliament set to work on drafting a new, more democratic constitution, and in 1996 the current Constitution of South Africa was adopted. It is said that South Africa currently has one of the most inclusive and broadest anti-discrimination clauses in the entire world (Britton & Fish, 2009). Historically, however, women have oftentimes been excluded from peacebuilding talks. Susan McKay writes, “Despite the work women do at the grassroots level to organize for peace, the majority of their voices go unheard during formal processes including peace negotiations,... constitution-creation, elections, and truth and reconciliation talks” (2004). Yet in a speech presented to the Fourth World Conference on Women, it was stated that women in South Africa received the best end of the deal when negotiating a new constitution, thus ensuring that women in South Africa receiving an extremely gender sensitive constitution (“Statement,” 1995). But how do women fair within the framework of this South African Constitution? Because of the democratic elections, women were now given a voice to elect new leadership. With this power, they could elect someone who worked to create a woman-friendly constitution. But as previously mentioned, women do not vote and think as a single bloc. Women think and feel differently depending on who is asked.

Within this new Constitution, the Bill of Rights claims all of the rights of the South African citizens post-apartheid. In this Bill of Rights, under the section titled, “Equality,” it says:

“Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law... The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth” (1996).

While the South African Constitution does not specifically mention women, it does point out that the state does not have any right to discriminate anyone on the grounds of gender. This incredible section ensures that women have all the same rights as their peers in South Africa.

Men and women should not be treated differently under the law; women should have access to the same resources as men and should not be unable to hold the same jobs as men. And while the Constitution never specifically says “women,” some parts of the Bill of Rights are geared directly towards women: for instance, the Bill of Rights, under the section titled, “Freedom and the security of the person,” the language states: “Everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person, which includes the right... to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources” (1996). This is most likely about the high rates of sexual violence in South Africa. Through the Bill of Rights, South Africa promises that violence, including violence that happens within the home, will not be permitted. From the few passages mentioned, the Constitution makes it clear that women do have clear and defined rights as citizens of South Africa.

Another instance of South Africa’s government working to secure women’s empowerment is through the “Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill” which was came under criticism in 2014. The bill says that a fifty percent quota of women must be imposed on political parties and management positions within the government both in the private and public sector. It also requires that both the public and private sectors report back to the Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities to show how gender mainstreaming has been incorporated in policies and programs (Vetten, 2014). The rationale behind this bill was so that women could be included in more program and policy making procedures around the country. From 2012 to 2013, many corporations in South Africa reported having failed meeting different gender expectations with regards to including women in higher positions of power. However, many in South Africa think that the Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill is redundant, given the extensive number of bills and legislation that has been passed already in

South Africa regarding women's empowerment. Lisa Vetten writes that the bill has parts that mirror previous pieces of legislation, including the Commission on Gender Equality Act, passed in 1996; the Skills Development Act, passed in 1998; the Employment Equity Act, passed in 1998; and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, passed in 2000 (2014). It is also argued that the bill only protects some groups of women, while other groups of women are ignored or left out of the bill's framework altogether. Some have questioned this bill's legitimacy, asking why old policy is being used under a new name and what the rationale politically is for having a bill like this (Vetten, 2014).

Having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, with Parliament passing bills that ensure women's rights is only a start, however (Fester, 1997). It is important to see how these rights are carried out in daily life in South Africa once they were written on paper. The carrying out of the law is just as important as the deliberation of including women in important legislature. Even though recent policies may have appeared to open the doors for women and even with a progressive Constitution, there are numerous obstacles set in place for women to achieve equality. It is said that only the effective translation of pen on paper to actual practice is what will encourage real empowerment and socio-economic uplifting of women (Phalane, 2004).

The Need for Empowerment among Women:

In 1995, a mere seventeen months after the first democratic elections were held in South Africa, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. The Minister of Health, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma presented a speech on the status of women in South Africa. She said:

“As women, we are seeking a privileged status with special rights. We have seen that laws constitutions and bills of rights in themselves cannot bring effective equality for women because women have a subordinate status in society. This status prevents us from claiming and exercising our human rights as equal citizens. That’s why the Platform for Action addresses the crucial areas that prevent the extension of human rights to women” (1995).

By saying this, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma explained why women’s rights were important, especially in South Africa. She stated that simply having bills and laws are not enough to promise equal opportunities for women in this country. Even with an increased and growing number of women involved in politics and decision-making processes, the struggle for women’s “liberation” remains one of the biggest struggles post-apartheid (Hassim, 2006). Women, especially black women in South Africa, are some of the poorest citizens in the country, and therefore they also remain one of the most disempowered groups as well (Keegan, 2004). Not having the economic ability to lift oneself out of poverty is a means of disempowerment. Typically, with South Africa being a more patriarchal society, women do not have control over their economic resources to begin with – women remain one of the poorest populations in the country, with no control over their resources. This coupled with numerous pieces of controversial legislation promising to empower women, it is obvious to see the lack of women’s empowerment in South Africa. Politics, in order to effect change, must be engaged from not only the elite in the country but also from the seemingly voiceless, whose need to be heard has never been more apparent (Hassim, 2006).

It can be argued that some of the women’s movements that survived post-apartheid are actually doing more harm than good in the community. It is thought that sometimes organizations, such as women’s organizations, could work to conserve the subordination of the status of women in South Africa (Fester, 1997). Some organizations did not believe that the

assertion of gender equality would advance the struggle of apartheid. There were far greater issues at hand than advancing the status of women: the injustices dealt from the apartheid regime were far greater than dealing with gender equality.

Despite having nearly fifty percent of the Parliamentary seats filled by women, given the current electoral system in South Africa, it can be difficult for women to project their needs onto candidates, since citizens in South Africa vote for a political party rather than a candidate. And while fifty percent is an astonishing number to have in Parliament, still many women find themselves without membership to invoke real change. That is why many women move into the public or civic sector to make their demands heard (Britton & Fish, 2009). It is important to note that the definition of empowerment can only apply to disenfranchised groups, who previously did not have the power to make their own choices in life. Empowerment can mean change; those who are disempowered are those who have not had the ability to make their own choices. Empowerment, therefore, refers to the progressions toward the overall ability to making one's own choices. Those who have always had the capability to make choices, however, may show a great deal of power, yet they are not considered "empowered" because they were never stripped of their ability to make choices in the first place, thus not being disempowered (Kabeer, 2005). The apartheid state only focused on the rights for the small minority of white men in the country, leaving the majority of South Africa to fall into the disempowered category. Since many women during apartheid, and even today twenty-one years removed from apartheid, were denied the processes of making their own choices, it can be assumed they are disempowered. Women are given hardly any political representation, since many politicians are loyal to party leaders, not the constituents, because of the way elections are held in South Africa. Women's interests oftentimes do not get the attention they need on the Parliamentary floor. And since women in

general in South Africa are such a rich and diverse group of people, with different needs ranging from person to person, it is difficult to single the definition of “women’s interests” to begin with.

Given the various needs of women’s interests and what defines empowerment, it can also be said that the concept of empowerment can depend on what kind of woman as well. Different women need different kinds of methods of empowerment: not all black South African women will need economic empowerment in the same way that not all white South African women will need empowerment from sexual violence. The idea of empowerment carries different connotations for different women, who each have their own individual needs as citizens (Matiwana, 2004). Empowerment for different women should be dependent on the different cultural and environmental needs: urban women would not flourish under the same empowerment used for rural women. It should also be done at the woman’s own pace – some women will find it easier to empower and develop themselves, and thus will find themselves empowered quicker, while some women will find it more difficult to find a sense of empowerment (Matiwana, 2004). Empowerment is not a one size fits all experience, and it should not be either. In the same sense, those helping with the empowerment need to know what kind of outcomes they should expect from the women they are working with. If an organization is hoping to work with economic empowerment, what should a previously disempowered woman be able to do with this new found economic empowerment? What tools should she gain for continuing her progress towards empowerment (Matiwana, 2004)?

NGOs and Women’s Empowerment:

During the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Minister of Health of South Africa stated that even with a gender sensitive constitution, simply having laws

does not guarantee empowerment. There must be active work done on the ground in order to ensure gender empowerment and equality (“Statement,” 1995). With the need for women’s empowerment becoming more of a demand, different NGOs and other women’s rights based organization have begun to reach out to help those who need empowerment most in the communities of Cape Town. Many organizations have adopted gender equality and women’s empowerment as part of their mission statements, hoping to further the cause of empowering women in Cape Town. The mantra that most of these organizations adopted with regards to gender empowerment was that the important thing about empowerment is not so much about women’s empowerment solely, but mostly about changing gender relations in the community. While women’s empowerment to some organizations is about making space for women for have leadership, the equality effort must be made to educate the men in the communities as well, since men are typically the one in decision-making positions (Meintjes, 2009). This can be a time consuming and difficult space to create. And sometimes these organizations work just to create a space for women to lead, not in the traditional sense, but in a space that is comfortable and that works for them. This is often a very difficult task, being as the entire fabric of society must be done in order to think of women in leadership (Matiwana, 2004). This different perception of women in leadership roles is because of the patriarchal structure of South Africa as a whole.

With regards to a patriarchal society, sometimes it is difficult for women to get the help they need from male-dominated organizations. In this case, many women find it necessary to come together to create spaces and structures where other women can receive the help that they need, with the primary motivation of improving lives of different women in the community (Keegan, 2004). Women in charge of these organizations work to identify with other women’s groups or activists in the area or community. However, some organizations do not think that their

organizations can extend into the larger community of women's movements. Some organizations only see themselves as strictly a local organization; working to better their community and not the women of South Africa (Keegan, 2004).

By building up a coalition of women's movements in South Africa, specifically in Cape Town, the divisions in the women's sector are three in number. National advocacy programs are those that typically work with legal and policy discussions at the national level. Networks and coalitions work within specific areas of focus; they work to address specific women's issues, such as sexual violence or the gender gap in wage pay. Finally, there are community-based organizations that work at a grassroots level to address urgent issues regarding women. These last groups are the most numerous but also the least visible in terms of recognition (*Strengthening*, 2009). It is often said that community-based organizations are typically the most vibrant and creative kinds of organizations that work for women. Since these groups tend to operate at the grassroots level, they tend to see the everyday side of women's issues in Cape Town. As previously mentioned, they are also the most numerous, meaning several different community-based organizations can exist in one community, and this is definitely the case for the city of Cape Town (Hassim, 2006).

Researchers in South Africa have found that there so many women who feel that they have the passion and desire for change in their communities, yet feel that they do not have skills for leadership. This is where different organizations can come into play: women can come together to learn how to become leaders and therefore learn to empower themselves and eventually others in the community. That is why it is so important to have women's organizations working at a grassroots level; so that they can be available to address the current and most urgent needs of the women in their communities and homes.

Methodology

My primary sources for this research project were a series of three interviews that, for the most part, were informal interviews. The people I interviewed were all women who currently belonged to or at one point belonged to an NGO working towards empowering women in Cape Town. I wanted to only interview women belonging to different NGOs because I felt like women who have experienced empowering other women would be the best ones to talk to on this subject. I also thought it would be interesting to compare the perspectives of different women involved with different organizations around Cape Town to see how different organizations were similar or different in how they handled the difficult topic of women's empowerment. These women could speak of their experiences within the NGO they belonged to or worked for and I would be able to see how different organizations handled empowerment. I spoke with women who were past members of the Black Sash, which was a predominantly white woman organization during apartheid. By speaking to these women, I not only learned more about the organization but also more about how these women view empowerment based on the perspectives of the NGO.

Interviews seemed like the best way to obtain the information I needed for this project because in informal interviews, participants can be free to be themselves, and I would get an honest answer about women's empowerment in South Africa. Interviewing also provided me with insight into not only the workings of different NGOs but also provided with me with an insight into the life of a woman living in Cape Town. While these women I chose to interview were involved in programs and organizations that worked and are still working to empower women, I thought that by interviewing them I could find out more about how empowerment can be seen as a two-way street: maybe those working to empower others can find that they

themselves are also empowered. I also wanted to understand empowerment in terms of the everyday woman in Cape Town that was free of the academic definitions of what empowerment means. It was my main goal to establish trust and confidence with my participants so they felt comfortable enough opening up to me about not only the work they did while involved with their NGOs but also about their honest reflections about women's empowerment as a whole. Honest reflection was what I hoped to gain from the interviews – I could balance the reflections of these participants with those academic reflections of the literature.

I chose my participants based off of interest in certain women's organizations around Cape Town. At first I contacted a member of one organization who spoke to the SIT class for lectures a few times. She told me about her experiences with that specific organization. From there, I was given names of different women within the previous organization who, when I contacted them, would give me names of other women belonging to organizations all across Cape Town. This process of obtaining information in this way is called Snowball Sampling – when one contact gives a name of someone else to reach out to and so on. Each woman I spoke too offered about two or three other names I could contact for my study, allowing for a wide range of opinions and answers that were all valuable to my research. I told each participant ahead of time that the interview would last no more than one hour. I had prepared a set of thirteen questions, and I asked each interview all of those questions, but I also allowed time for discussion as long as it was received well by the participant.

In addition to the primary sources of my interviews, I also used recent secondary sources relating to women's empowerment during apartheid and after apartheid ended in 1994. I mainly looked at these sources before my interviews, but also during the interview process as well. The documents I looked at came from peer-reviewed, scholarly journals and government articles. The

articles I read spoke of the different reasons women come together as a group, the rights women have under the new South African Constitution, and how the government is failing the women of the state. Going into my interviews with this information already known to me made the interview process go much more smoothly. When the women I spoke too referenced Clause 11 or the Commission on Gender Equality, I was able to understand what the women were speaking of without interrupting the interview to seek clarification. Knowing this allowed me to establish a framework for which I could understand my participants better and ask more in-depth questions. The literature I chose to read and understand was chosen with the intent of looking at the full picture of women's need for empowerment in South Africa.

Participants (names have been changed, organizations kept private)

1. Elizabeth (14 April 2015): currently pursuing her Ph.D. She also has a long history of working for the non for profit or NGO sector. She worked and volunteered for a number of NGOs in the community. She was interviewed in her office. She identifies as white.
2. Susan (28 April 2015): currently working as a cattle farmer. During apartheid, she worked as a journalist and freelance editor. As a journalist, she worked for Oxford University Press and the United Nations. Now, she does freelance editing for friends and comrades. She was interviewed at her home. She identifies as white.
3. Linda (5 May 2015): currently directing her own NPO in the Cape Flats neighborhoods. She works out of her home, and she specifically works with gender based violence within her community. She was interviewed in her office. She identifies as coloured.

Ethical Reflexivity

The conversations I had with my participants were sometimes about sensitive issues, such as political beliefs and women's rights. I tried to be aware of how I asked my questions to my participants. I also prefaced each of my interviews by saying that if the participants felt at any point they were uncomfortable, they could skip the question or end the interview completely. I felt that making my participants comfortable and relaxed was important for the project in order to get honest and intuitive answers to my questions. One bias I was very aware of during my time interviewing women of Cape Town, was my "Western" identity since I am from the United States. Women's rights and equality is definitely something that I feel a very strong attachment too and is something that is seen a definite cultural value in the States. This topic is also one that I feel very passionately about, so by acknowledging my bias before each interview, I was careful not to let my own views shape the nature of the interview; I did not want my Western ideologies to influence what my participants spoke about during the interview. Due to my identity of being American, I was worried that at time my participants may have been giving me the answers I just wanted to hear; because of this, I hoped to remain purely inquisitive and accepted each answer without much questioning to make sure my participants were being honest with me. Another way I protected my participants was that before each interview, I also promised to change their names in order to secure anonymity. Overall, I felt like my participants felt comfortable speaking with me about women's empowerment.

Findings and Analysis

By writing this study, it was my goal to analyze the findings from the in-depth interviews I had using the literature I reviewed on the topic of women's empowerment in South Africa. By interviewing these three women, all involved in organizations promoting women's equality, I hoped to compare experiences with involvement in different organizations in Cape Town. I also hoped to gain a broader understanding of the definition of empowerment and what it may mean to different people throughout the community. In this portion of my study, I have outlined the major themes that came across while interviewing these three women about women's empowerment, and then my analysis of the interviews and literature will follow.

Findings

Definitions of Empowerment and Power

One of the first questions I asked Susan, Linda, and Elizabeth were about their own definitions of empowerment and how that pertains to the organizations with which they were involved. The general definition they gave me were very similar; Elizabeth told me that she believes that empowering women is all about giving them power: "The word empowerment... means that women are given the power to be able to do things that they may not have been able to do before." When I asked Elizabeth to clarify, she told me there were several instances within her organization that allowed her to see firsthand the effects of empowerment. She spoke of how her organization lobbied on behalf of abortion rights for women:

"We had a lot of people who were very serious about [abortion] so we were part of the lobbying group that supported legal abortions and that women would have the right to choose. So I would say that... it would have empowered women in the sense that, I think women out there would then say, 'There's this organization out there, and they are supporting our needs.'"

Elizabeth felt very strongly about having the right to choose whether or not an abortion belonged to women in Cape Town. By her definition of empowerment and given the example of abortion rights, she felt that her organization helped give women the power to choose whether or not they wanted to have an abortion. This is also what Elizabeth meant by granting women the power over something they previously could not do – before her organization acted on behalf of women wanting a choice, women in South Africa could not have safe and legal abortions. Through lobbying of the government, however, Elizabeth’s organization was able to grant women the choice of having legal abortion, thus granting them a power that they previously did not have.

Susan also gave a similar answer with regards to her own definition of empowerment. She, however, cautioned me on the use of that word, saying that it has become a word she is suspicious of, for reasons she did not specifically mention. Though she did say that: “But I’m all for women being able to run their own lives, ideally in corporation with the rest of humanity.” Susan also shared examples of what empowerment would look like with the organization she also worked for. She spoke of empowering women as being equivalent to women having the power necessary to effect change: “But what I think is particularly important is that women acquire enough power as individuals and also as a group... to put a stop to sexual violence and the abuse and neglect of women and children. That to me seems like the most urgent thing.” Susan believes that when women are empowered, they have the power, either as individuals or as a group, to inspire change in their communities and homes. Yet while answering this question, she remained hesitant, as she previously said that empowerment is a word she typically is wary of, with changes in government that she dislikes, she cautions against using empowerment so freely.

When I asked Susan if she felt empowered herself living in Cape Town today, she responded, “I’ve taken my own power. No one’s... given it to me, that’s for sure.” When I asked her to explain further, she told me that being a white woman in South Africa today, Susan finds it hard to have a voice that people take seriously. She does feel empowered, but she managed her empowerment on her own.

Linda remarked something similar to Susan when I asked if she felt empowered as well. She told me plainly:

“I think that I am a woman that is still learning, and I am a woman trying to find support and help from other women in this community. The skills that I have and the opportunities to know what I know have not come from anybody... I had to leave [my home] to get some of the skills, knowledge, and context that I currently have to be able to come back and teach it to other women in this community.”

Linda felt alike to Susan in that they both felt that they had taken their own power. No one gave them the tools necessary to feel empowered in their organizations and communities; they had to retrieve it in their own ways.

Another thing similar between Susan and Linda was that they both seemed nervous of using the word “empowerment.” Linda also talked about how she tends to have a problem with the word empowerment and its misuse in Cape Town. Yet she described her organization as one that works to empower women in her community. Linda firmly believed that her organization worked to give women the space to use and build upon what they already know. However, in keeping with the same kind of theme as Susan and Elizabeth, Linda believes that her organization works to “provide adequate tools for women to use to access what they already know and to assist them... to make their own choices.” So in a sense, Linda also believes that empowerment is similar to power. Women, especially in the community where Linda is from, need power to exercise choice in their everyday lives.

Empowerment seems to be equivalent to having power according to Elizabeth, Linda, and Susan. Through the process of empowerment, women are able to have power in their communities, and therefore can establish change. These three women also highlighted different areas where they saw a need for women's empowerment. While Elizabeth spoke of abortion rights, Linda talked about support and the power of choice, and Susan spoke of sexual violence, these issues are relevant in South Africa, and a need for women's empowerment to help eliminate these problems seems necessary.

Empowering Women in NGOs

Susan, Linda, and Elizabeth spoke of women's empowerment, but also in terms of empowering those within the organization as well. Elizabeth told me plainly:

“When you talk about empowering women, it's also about the people in the organization who were also empowered. And you mustn't forget that... So I think the other level of empowerment is where women felt like they had a place to stand up and be safe and protest, you know?”

This was a layer of empowerment that I had not thought of before. Elizabeth explained that many of the women involved in her organization came from very privileged backgrounds in the Cape Town community. For these people to come into an organization to help those who are at a disadvantage in society is a humbling and remarkable experience, one that volunteers with an NGO can certainly feel empowered from.

Susan also mentioned empowerment within her organization as well. Her involvement in her NGO led her to a sense of empowerment as well, as previously mentioned by her saying that she had taken her own power. She told me:

“I think that for the women they were helping and the women in [the organization], it was empowering. Everyone was learning more about each other

and how to conduct their lives in these terribly constrained circumstances... That is empowering, to engage and to be effective.”

Susan believed that in order to have effective change in a society, both parties, those seeking help and those providing it, need to feel empowered. From this sense of empowerment, other experiences can happen as well; Susan mentioned painting a broader picture of what is going on in a country, specifically during apartheid, can result from the feeling of empowerment. Mutual empowerment allowed for those who had the ability to go out and explain the situation to others, providing a framework to get more aid to those needing it.

Linda found empowerment through her organization as well. She described her NPO as a place where “women... come and to build one some of the things they already [know].” She described a situation within her organization where women come from all walks of life within her community come together to learn from one another to realize their full potential as women.

While empowering others in their community, the women I spoke with also felt the empowerment within members of the organization was equally as important. This was an idea I had previously not thought of before speaking with these three women.

Different Types of Women’s Empowerment Needed

As Elizabeth already mentioned, during her time with her organization, making abortion legal for women was incredibly important. Both Susan and Elizabeth spoke of a need for women’s empowerment in Cape Town in a number of ways. The issues they spoke of ranged from problems specific to Cape Town extending to all of South Africa.

Elizabeth told me about things she wished her organization had done to help the population of women who needed empowerment in South Africa. She spoke of labor struggles of

women in the community where she worked, meaning unemployment was particularly bad for women in the area in which she worked. Elizabeth also told me: “Particular cases regarding empowerment for me would be the abortion bill, social grants, and where vulnerable women were concerned... That was mostly black women from townships.” She said that her organization worked to shed light on these particular issues, working both within the community to make sure women’s complaints were heard and at the national level, lobbying on behalf of these women. Elizabeth said that most often she worked in the legal path, working more with lobbying the government to ensure that women’s stories were heard: “I wanted to stop the problem at the top. For me, that was the legal route. I’m not so sure that the legal route is the only way though. There can maybe be something else.” Elizabeth expressed a desire to have more creative ways to approach women’s empowerment, rather than strictly lobbying. But those issues that she did speak of her important for her to see that they become noticed by people in higher positions of power.

Susan spoke of similar issues regarding women in Cape Town. While she was a volunteer for her organization, she talked about the different responsibilities women had: “You’ve got the home to run; you’ve got kids and perhaps a husband to look after; you’ve got a job to do; you’ve got the oldies to look after... It’s very tough to be a woman.” By mentioning all of these different tasks and jobs of being a woman, Susan remarks on how women can feel overwhelmed and like they cannot turn anywhere for help. Lightening the burden on Cape Town’s women would be a step towards empowering women, according to Susan. She also mentioned: “Women don’t control the money; they don’t get to make the decisions, even though there are some very powerful women.” She remarked that these issues can affect the nature of the country as a whole. The fact that women, even twenty-one years removed from apartheid, still do not have the ability

to make decisions is absolutely appalling. She realizes that there have been improvement, and suggesting that there has been zero improvement in South Africa is wrong. Susan also brought of the fact that rape and violence against women is wide-spread across not only South Africa but across the continent of Africa as well. In order for women to gain a sense of power in their lives, Susan told me, the acceptance of rape and violence against women must be eradicated.

For Linda, the types of empowerment that were important to her also feel within the realm of gender based violence, since that is what her organization deals with on a day-to-day basis. But she also felt passionately about education of young girls. She told me that young girls continuously drop out of school where she is from, and many more do not go on to university: “There are more girls that do not remain in school than boys because [girls] exit school early. But we find that there are many girls that do finish school that end up pregnant and [then] not going to university.” Linda thought that the lack of education among the young women in her community was one of the major contributing factors to the need for empowerment. Without the proper education, she thought, then women are not educated and cannot have the tools and resources to escape domestic violence.

Clause 11: Maintenance Amendment Bill

Both Susan and Elizabeth spoke of Clause 11, a bill that would help many single mothers in South Africa, as something that would significantly help the cause for empowering women. This bill, as described by Elizabeth, was about having single mothers receive a grant from the state providing funds to help with the children. Elizabeth described the need for the grant:

“Typically... women have babies and that was it, and they would go. And there was a maintenance grant for others who could not support their children. The maintenance grant would, it used to be when I was [with the organization], and

there was a grant that would support the mother and the child. So the mother would get money, because she is looking after the child. And for each child, the mother received a certain amount. So because that issue came through the door [of our offices] we became incredibly sensitive to it and we took it up at every turn. And I was particularly devastated when the state cut the grant to mothers. So that was a big blow. The State said they could not afford [the grant] further down the line.”

According to Elizabeth, this bill was incredibly important to the betterment of women in not only Cape Town but to the women of South Africa as a whole. The bill was important to women who needed to get back on their feet and provide for their children. Yet the state took the funding away.

Susan believed that this bill was incredibly important to women as well. She said the clause in the bill would work to help protect women and their children. She described the bill as a weapon: “That clause in the bill would be a huge weapon against that very situation to ensure that men who father children are forced to be responsible, in monetary terms if no other. The figure of people defaulting, the fathers, is [close to] 48 percent among black people.” She believed that women lost a very important ally within the legislation. Susan said that one of the biggest struggles she sees among city women in her organization is that, “Many of them struggle with taking after abandoned children.” Certainly, she feels, this bill would be helping for looking after children and making sure mothers have the resources available to care properly for them as well.

While Linda did not mention Clause 11 specifically by name, she did mention that women struggle to financially provide for their families, especially in her community. She also mentioned the lack of support from the government end in making this a reality:

“[T]here hasn’t been any programs that have been brought to this community headed by the government purely looking at, in a developmental way, how to get women from an improvised circumstance (social, economic, working below the

bread line) and giving them skills, giving them support, and then mentoring them to become entrepreneurs where they are able to generate an income not just for themselves but also to be able to socio-economically add to the country.”

This is an important piece of work for Linda’s organization – her organization works with women in her community to make sure that they have the necessary skills to provide, even when the government does not provide this framework.

Men’s Education

While all three women mentioned the importance of women’s empowerment, all three women also mentioned the importance of men’s empowerment too, specifically men’s education. Elizabeth mentioned that her organization worked with not just women, but men too. She said that what she really loved about working with her organization was that “they [her organization] tended to men and women. They weren’t just for women... It was really about men and women. They were for South Africans, no matter what color they are.” She also spoke of the need for men’s empowerment as well, and how this too happened within the walls of the organization she worked for: “It also made everyone realize that they did something quite amazing. I think they empowered themselves... I think they empowered the men that they saw. I don’t think men and women felt separate from each other.” It seemed important to Elizabeth that men and women alike were treated equally during her time with her organization. While she did not elaborate on the specifics of how men felt empowered, she did stress to me a few times during the interview that her organization did focus on both men and women.

Susan saw the need for men’s empowerment if not more so than the need for women’s empowerment. She spoke of how there needs to be a sort of cultural shift away from a “big chief” or patriarchal way of thinking, not just in South Africa but all throughout Africa,

continent-wide. She told me, “As far as men and women are concerned, men have been so much more reluctant to give up power, and they have been for thousands of years, and have yet to really do so.” In this way, she said, a re-shaping of society must take place, not so that men necessarily give up all control, but so there is a balance of power between men and women equally. To do this, Susan said that education would be key in redefining how men perceive the world. She said, “Certainly women are oppressed with regards to men, of course not all... But then there is also education.” Education, in Susan’s opinion would be the most important for finding a solution to men’s power dominance. By education men on gender sensitive issues, such as domestic violence and rape, Susan believes that things will start to change in not only Cape Town, but throughout South Africa as well.

Linda also thought that education is necessary to reshape how men think in Cape Town daily life. She explained her opinions on why this perception maybe came to be:

“Yeah, I believe that if you want to do anything in terms of impacting domestic violence, we need to have more programs for men and young boys. And we need organizations to look at men’s perceptions of what they see as power, the patriarchy, and the fact that men have inheritance of a culture of violence. Their parents and grandparents went through the apartheid years and so for some men they know nothing more than violence.”

Her opinions of male violence are important for understanding how men work in the community where she runs her organization. She also explains how it can be hard to reshape ideas of patriarchy when resources are scarce in her community. She told me it was difficult to help empower men on certain subjects like violence when no other organizations like hers exist for men, especially in a township like where she lives: “There are no organizations here that do that kind of stuff here, no.” She told me of the frustrations she feels when she works so hard to

empower the women who come to her organization for help, yet sees the masses of men who also need encouragement and support in order to effect change in the Cape Town community.

Analysis

When I first set out to conduct this study, my main research question was to identify why a need for women's empowerment exists in South Africa, given the progressive new Constitution ensuring the rights of all citizens. Through my interviews, I found that certain quotes from my participants conflicted with each other and other times they related with each other. My hypothesis at the beginning of this study was that women need to be empowered because they need to understand their rights fully in the framework of the South African Constitution, and a gap may exist between the government and the citizens, creating a need for empowerment. I thought that my participants would speak more about the Constitution, and while that topic did come about in conversations, my participants spoke more about issues on the ground in Cape Town that contributed to the overarching need for empowerment. Some of my participants even said that the Constitution of South Africa was substantial; it was practices of the people that need to be altered. One thing that was absent in my findings, however, was a lack of the word "feminism." None of my participants ever explicitly stated that they were feminists or subscribed to a feminist way of thinking about their organizations.

Different Ways of Empowerment

By speaking with these three different women, who all come from very different backgrounds and different layers of involvement within their communities, I found that there are several different ways to empower women in the city of Cape Town. There is not a "one-size-

fits-all” type of empowerment; the same kinds of empowerment cannot work for all members of an oppressed population. For Elizabeth, the kind of empowerment that she had experience with dealt with making sure that women knew their rights – she was particularly keen on the legal route of empowerment. The organization that she worked for lobbied the government to make sure that women knew the extent of the law on their rights as citizens of South Africa. She spoke about a team of lawyers and volunteers working to create a case when Elizabeth’s organization was alerted to an issue effecting women’s rights specifically:

“[T]he issue would be taken up not only for the person but for the bigger cause. And we would take things to [a center] and say we need to make a case out of this because it affects a whole group of people out there. And maybe there might be more women than men but the right is everybody’s right.”

With Elizabeth’s organization, lobbying on behalf of women in the community was a kind of empower that worked for her organization and the women that she worked with.

While Elizabeth worked with the legal path, Linda worked with education. She works with women in her community to help them develop the skills necessary in her community to be successful. Linda firmly believes that in order for women to be successful, they must build upon what they already know. Linda believes that women come to the table with a set of ideas and skills at the ready; it is just how these skills are developed to make these already empowered women more successful and product in the socio-economic sense of Cape Town.

While both women work in the field of women’s empowerment, both women have two different styles of empowerment – this is confirmed through the literature I analyzed in my literature review. Empowerment for diverse women should be and is dependent on the different needs, whether those are cultural or environmental needs (Matiwana, 2004). The women Linda works with have different empowerment needs then the women Elizabeth used to work with in

her organization, and there is a reason behind this, according to the literature. Women in Linda's community are vastly different than the women that Elizabeth worked to empower. If similar methods of empowerment were used on the different women that Elizabeth and Linda worked with, then the empowerment the women received would not be as effective as the empowerment specific to region and culture.

Government's Role in Empowerment

I expected that the women I spoke to would be skeptical and opposed to certain pieces of legislation put forth by the South African government with regards to women's empowerment. On the contrary, the women I spoke to seemed to be in favor of the current laws and legislation of the South African government. Linda told me clearly: "You know, there's nothing wrong with our legislation. We have one of the most progressive domestic violence acts [in the world]." She went on to explain that what she dislikes about the position of government in South Africa is that there is no follow through on the legislation – the Constitution is rock solid, but the problem is that there is no one who really works to see the contents of the Constitution through: Linda told me, "[T]here's nobody in this province or in this country that really champions equal rights and opportunities for women."

Susan also said something similar to Linda. She spoke about how she personally sees little to no evidence of work actually being done within the communities of Cape Town to empower women. Susan said, "I see no evidence of our government doing anything to protect women." She told me that the framework is there, the legislation is available to protect women in the country, but the implementation of the law is what is missing from this puzzle of empowerment. The term Susan used was one I particularly liked; she called it "Window

Dressing.” According to Susan, this term means “setting out an attractive shop front, meanwhile all the same old [nonsense] is going on behind.” I liked this analogy to explain the failure of the South African government when it comes to the implementation of certain pieces of legislation.

The literature was also in agreement with the statements provided by these two women. While South Africa does boast to have one of the most advanced constitutions in the world, there are considerable gaps between the legislation passed and the application of this legislation. As with the example of the Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill as mentioned previously, the bill was presented as a progressive new piece of legislation promising to protect the interests of women but also to work as a nation to empower the women of the country as well. However, a closer examination reveals that this bill is comprised of pieces of previous legislation the government already put forth (Vetten, 2014). Why is it necessary for a bill to be put forth that seems progressive and promises the protection of women’s rights but is made up of pieces of legislation that already exists? The failure is on the state then for failing to produce bills and laws that actually work to protect women. While the Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill seems like an incredible and wonderful bill that works for the betterment of women in South African society, it can be termed as just another element to the current state of Window Dressing, as Susan put it so plainly.

Why is There a Need?

Along with the failure of certain bills and laws to reach their full potential under the law, some of the women I interviewed seemed to think that the major reason for the failure of progress in the government with regards to women would be the lack of resources women have available. Susan said that she does not think that there are enough resources available not only in

Cape Town but in South Africa as a whole. She told me that the keys to the treasury are in the wrong hands, not being accessible to those who desperately need the funds in order to empower women. She said that besides not having the adequate funds to promote women's empowerment, Susan believes that too many key elements of empowerment are dropped by the government, like funding and people who care about empowerment as a whole. She seriously doubts that the resources are not there for women who need them.

However, Linda disagreed completely. She felt that the resources were available and abundant in Cape Town, throughout the Western Province as well. What she stressed to me though was the accessibility of these resources that was the real problem:

“I think that the resources are here in this province [Western Province]. It's just a shame that we have to leave our communities like I did to access those resources. I believe that resources should be brought to the most marginalized and improvised communities like ours and the rest of the [surrounding areas]. It's not that we are in a province which is poorly resourced. I feel that there are quite enough resources because if you look at the development that is happening in [some historically black townships] as a whole... versus no development happening here then it's not even is that there are no resources. There are resources; it's just not going to our community. No, it's not equally distributed. And also it's just not brought to the community.”

The real problem, according to Linda, is not that there is a lack of resources in Cape Town. It is that women do not have the capability to obtain these resources and use them to their full potential. The resources are being sources to other places, driving a wedge between certain communities of those women who feel they have the tools necessary for empowerment and women who do not.

Linda's statement does match up with some of the literature that I reviewed: Britton and Fish (2009) say that resources usually are available for women but it is just the accessibility that becomes the main problem. It is also hard for NGOs and NPOs to get funding because the can be

funded by the government sometimes, but often the funding they do receive is minimal and not enough to get programs off the ground that they need to with regards to women's empowerment.

Whether or not the South African or even the Western Province government has the ability to distribute resources is not the question to the women that I interviewed. The question is that many people are being denied the accessibility to obtain these resources that could significantly empower and improve their lives.

Lack of the Word Feminism

Something that I found interesting when speaking to the participants of my study is that none of the women labeled themselves explicitly as feminists nor did they call the actions of their organizations feminist in ideology or practice. The only person who used the word "feminism" was Susan when she spoke of different people who wrote on the subject of empowerment. In my opinion, feminism tends to be a term that is attached to nearly every program or article put forth by the government in the United States. My definition of feminism, as an American woman, is that I believe in true equality of the sexes in social, political, and economics terms. Much of what I spoke to these women about whom I interviewed would be, in my opinion as well, feminist ideologies and programs. But none of my participants used the term feminism to describe their actions in empowering women.

I also found it very interesting as well that the literature I examined also was sparing with the word feminism. This I can probably ascribe to my ideas of feminism in the Western world, where it seems that everything having to do with women's empowerment is labeled as a feminist program. However, I did not find this to be the case in Cape Town. It almost seemed to me that

people used the word feminism very hesitantly if at all when speaking about the work that they do to empower women.

I can probably attribute this reasoning to the fact that my ideas of feminism are shaped by the culture and ideology that I believe in back home in the United States. The word here, in Cape Town, may have a different meaning or connotation than in the Western world. I will discuss this topic further in my recommendations for further study.

Conclusion

When I started my independent study project to look at women's empowerment in the broad sense in Cape Town, South Africa, I wanted to look at the similarities and differences between women working with different NGOs and NPOs. My initial thought when starting this paper was that definitions of empowerment among the women would be similar and that the needs and rationale behind women's empowerment programs would also be similar. I thought this because of my own personal ideas of what women's empowerment is and by the way I perceived South Africa upon arrival. Finding out what I did, however, proved that while the three women I interviewed had similar ideas of what empowerment meant, their reasoning and rationale for why women need to be empowered were very different; depending on where a woman is from and what she does, empowerment can vary from woman to woman. I also found out that aside from women, it is a common idea that men must also be empowered, or at least educated, in order for full empowerment to take effect. This was an idea I had no considered until I interviewed the three women in my study.

Through this study of learning more about and understanding different ideas of women's empowerment in Cape Town, I gained valuable insight from the three women I interviewed. My own assumptions were challenged, including my ideas and perceptions of feminism in South Africa. I feel that I also gained insight through the literature I examined. While I only interviewed three women who lived in Cape Town, I think that my study highlights important conclusions about the nature and accessibility of women's empowerment in South Africa as a whole. The concerns and ideas from my participants show a concern for the well-being of their fellow South African woman.

Recommendations for Future Study

After researching and coming to conclusions about my study, I believe that a wider sample of participants involved in NGOs and NPOs must be obtained to fully analyze the complex nature of women's empowerment in Cape Town. Cape Town is a city of many different and diverse people living together, and my findings show that different women will need different forms of empowerment. Due to the different natures of empowerment in Cape Town, my research shows that several different communities and organizations need to be sampled in order to paint a more concise picture of what it means to empower women in this city. It may also be interesting for future research to include race in the study as well – to compare perceptions of empowerment from white women and black women and coloured women. These perceptions may be interesting to compare across racial and socio-economic lines.

Abbreviations

ANC – African National Congress

ANCWL – African National Congress Women’s League

FSAW – Federation of South African Women

HDI – Human Development Index

NGO – non-government organization

NPO – non-for profit organization

UDF – United Democratic Front

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

WNC – Women’s National Coalition

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. First, tell me a little bit about yourself: your name, where you work, family, hobbies, etc.
2. Tell me a little bit more about the organization you belong to: when did you start there? How long have you worked for this organization? What do you do with this organization, etc.?
3. What does the word “empowerment” mean to you? Why is this an important word do you think?
4. Do you think women are empowered based off of your definition of empowerment in Cape Town? Why or why not?
5. What kinds of empowerment (economic, education, etc.) would you like to see for women in Cape Town?
6. What kinds of methods exist for women’s empowerment? Are there programs put in place by the government that you are aware of?
7. What role do you think the South Africa/Cape Town government has played in ensuring women’s empowerment? Do you think that the government should be involved in empowerment? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel empowered today as a South African woman? Why or why not?
9. Why do you think there needs to be women’s empowerment in Cape Town?
10. What role do you think the organization you are a part of plays in empowering women in the community? Do you think your organization is effective? Why or why not?
11. Do women need empowerment more than men in Cape Town? Why or why not?
12. What are some contributing factors to the need for empowerment in Cape Town (poverty, unemployment, education, etc.)?
13. Do you think there are enough resources in Cape Town for women to get the empowerment they need? Why or why not? What more needs to be done?
14. Do you have anything else you’d like to add or tell me?

Appendix B: Consent Form

SIT Study Abroad

a program of World Learning



CONSENT FORM

Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to look closely at women's empowerment programs since apartheid ended. I intend to look at different opinions of woman belonging or who have belonged to different NGOs to understand how this organization works to empower women in the community as well as within Cape Town as a whole.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about your experiences with your organization either as an employee (present or past) or as a participant in the empowerment programs. The interview will last no longer than one (1) hour. You may refuse to participate in this interview at any time during or before the interview process, even if you consent. You may also skip any questions that you feel are uncomfortable or end the interview at any time.

Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

- a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
- b. **Anonymity** - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
- c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

Participant's name printed

Participant's signature and date

Interviewer's name printed

Interviewer's signature and date