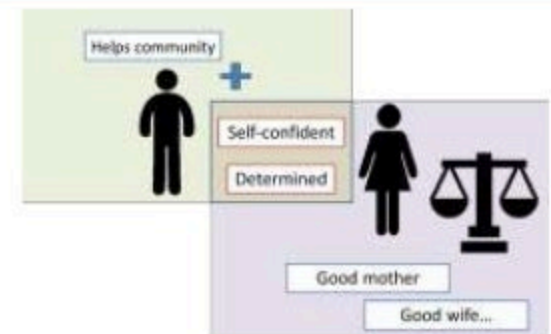
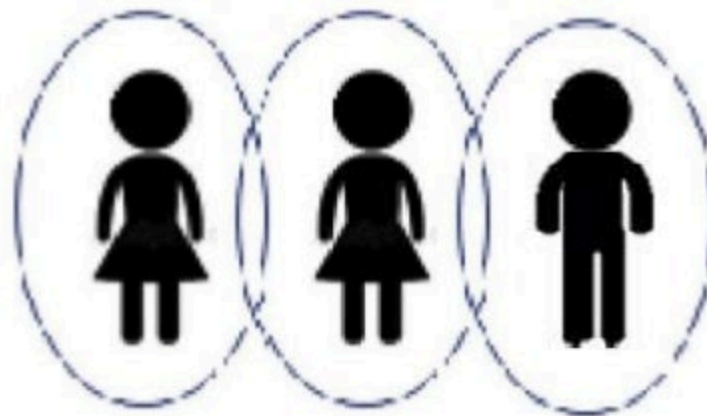
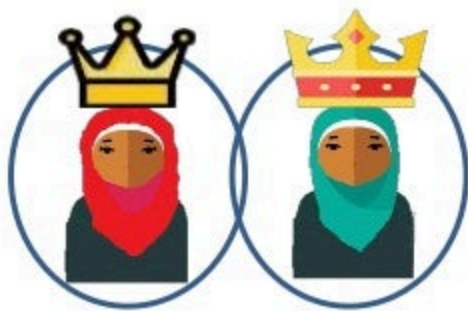


Power through: A new concept in the empowerment discourse

A. Galiè and C.R. Farnworth

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Power through: A new concept in the empowerment discourse

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1. Introduction

Women's empowerment describes the capability of women for self-determination: to take control over their own circumstances and to realize their aspirations in order to live a life they have reason to value (Annas, 2003; Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1990). The emphasis is on 'agency' described by Kabeer (1999) as the ability to define goals, have meaningful choices, and to act to achieve desired outcomes (see also Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Nussbaum, 1999; Sen, 1999). Women's agency can be exercised at the individual cognitive level (e.g. reflection and analysis), as well as at relational and collective societal levels (e.g. decision-making, negotiation, manipulation, resistance) (Cathy Rozel Farnworth et al., 2018a,b; Yount et al., 2015).

Many understandings of empowerment are individualistic because they focus on facilitating the expansion of an individual's capabilities to

Social norms clearly play a role in determining 'the possible' when it comes to the choices women may decide to make and to enact. Social norms lie outside the immediate control (or agency) of individuals and can greatly influence individual choice. Stewart, 2013 argues that no one can experience complete autonomy: alongside political and economic constraints, their choices are heavily influenced by underlying social norms (Farnworth et al., 2017, n.d.). The theory of doxa put forward by Bourdieu (1977: 167) suggests that some social norms are so deeply embedded 'in our ways of thinking and acting that we [...] follow them unconsciously and without deliberation'. Gender norms, in this understanding, are the socially constructed and accepted roles and stereotypes ascribed to gender that are naturalized in people's behaviour: a kind of unquestioned truth which people live by (Farnworth et al, nd).

Empowerment conceptualizations

Capability to realize one's aspirations in order to live a life s/he has reason to value

(Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1990)

Often considered an **individual process** of change...

Tied up to '**agency**'...

Can be **operationalized** through:

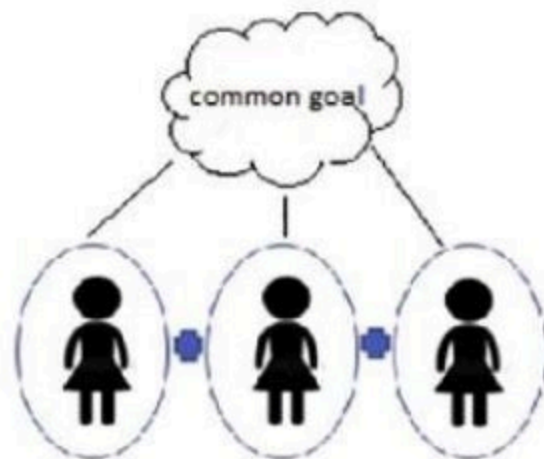
1. Recognition
2. Access to resources
3. Access to opportunities
4. Decision-making

Four definitions of power...

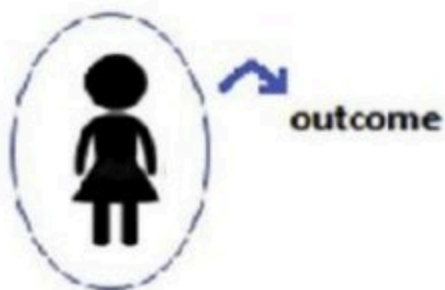
Power within



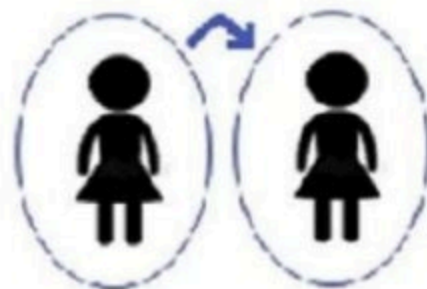
Power with



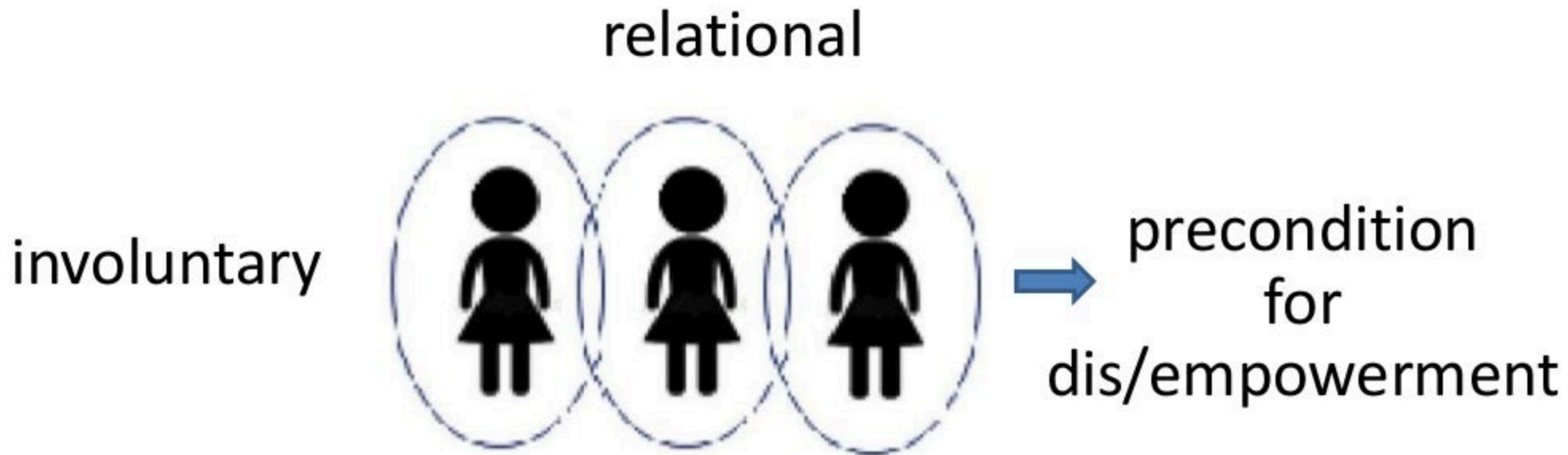
Power to



Power over



Power through



Mediated by:

1. the empowerment status of associated others
2. personal characteristics vis-à-vis gender norms
3. normative judgment by others

Methodology

Research question: 'What does empowerment mean to you?'

Who: 12 women and 24 men crop farmers – Syria

24 men and 24 women dairy livestock keepers – Tanzania

20 men and 22 women milk traders - Kenya

Where: agricultural communities in Syria, Kenya, Tanzania

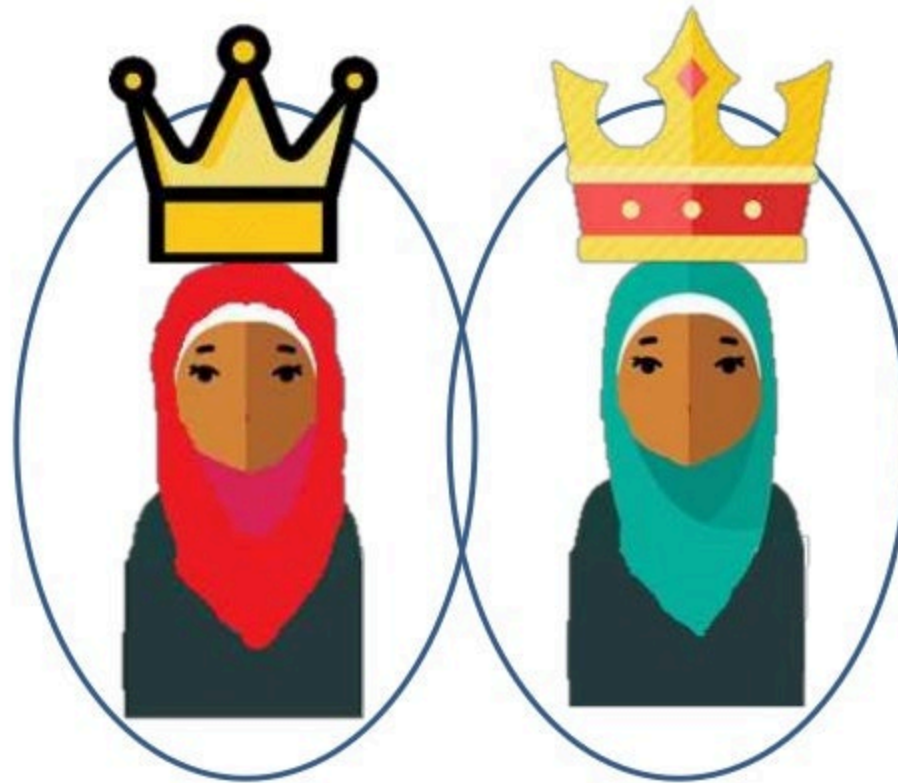
When: 2006 and 2017

Method: Individual semi-structured interviews; single-sex focus group discussions (FGDs)

*1. Power through by association
with significant others*

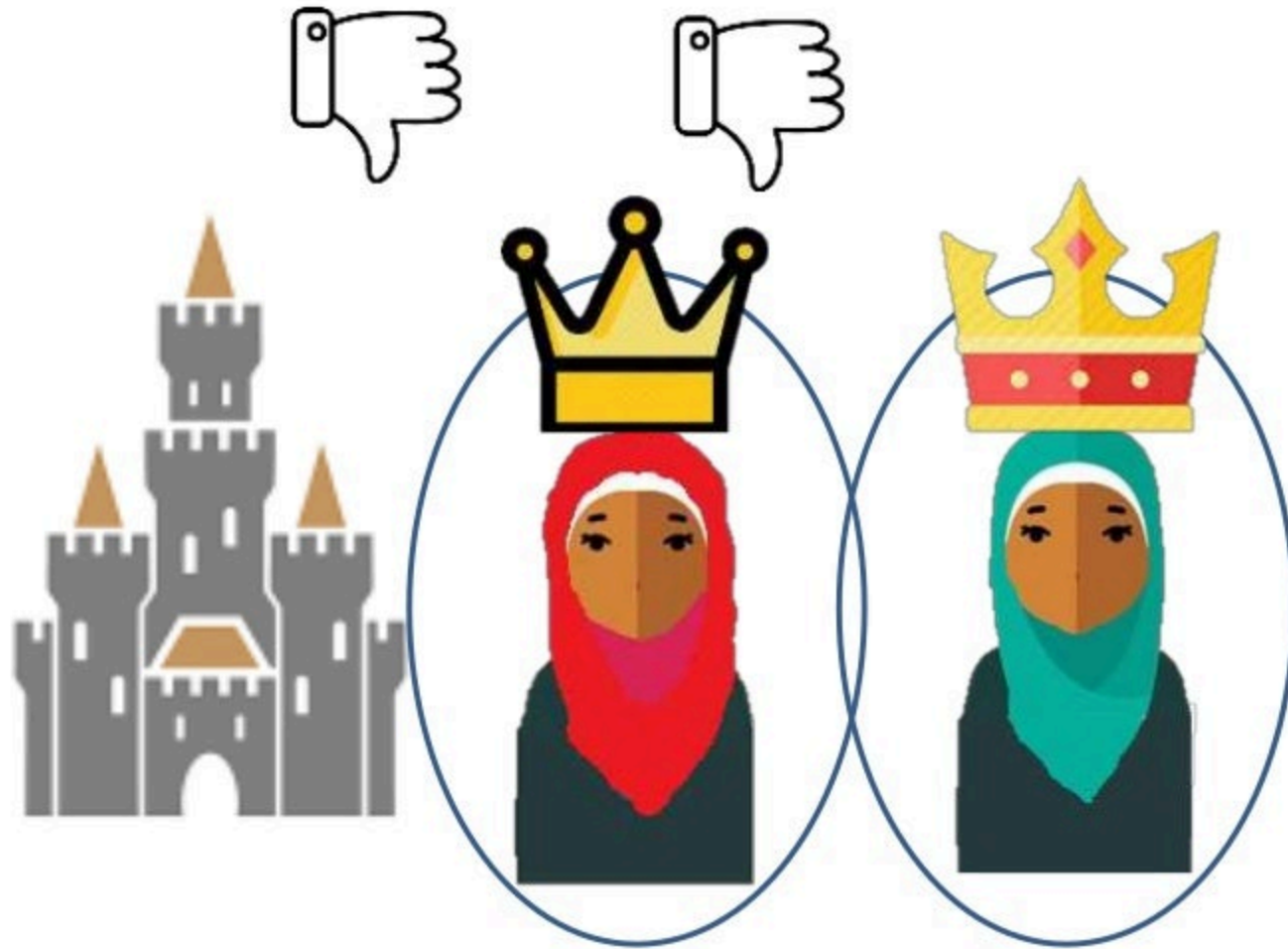
Involuntary empowerment through association with significant others - Syria

e.g. Your better job: my enhanced empowerment



Higher social status = a precondition
for more effective agency

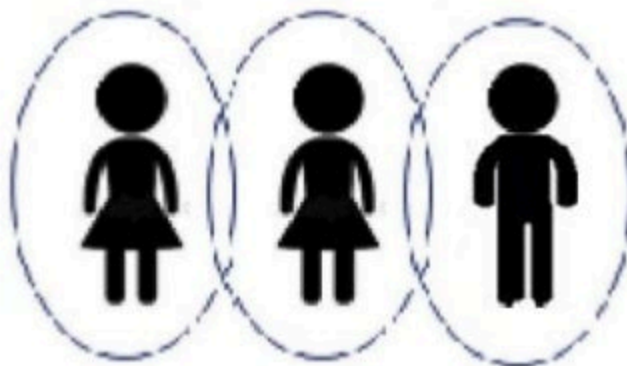
Involuntary disempowerment



Key message 1

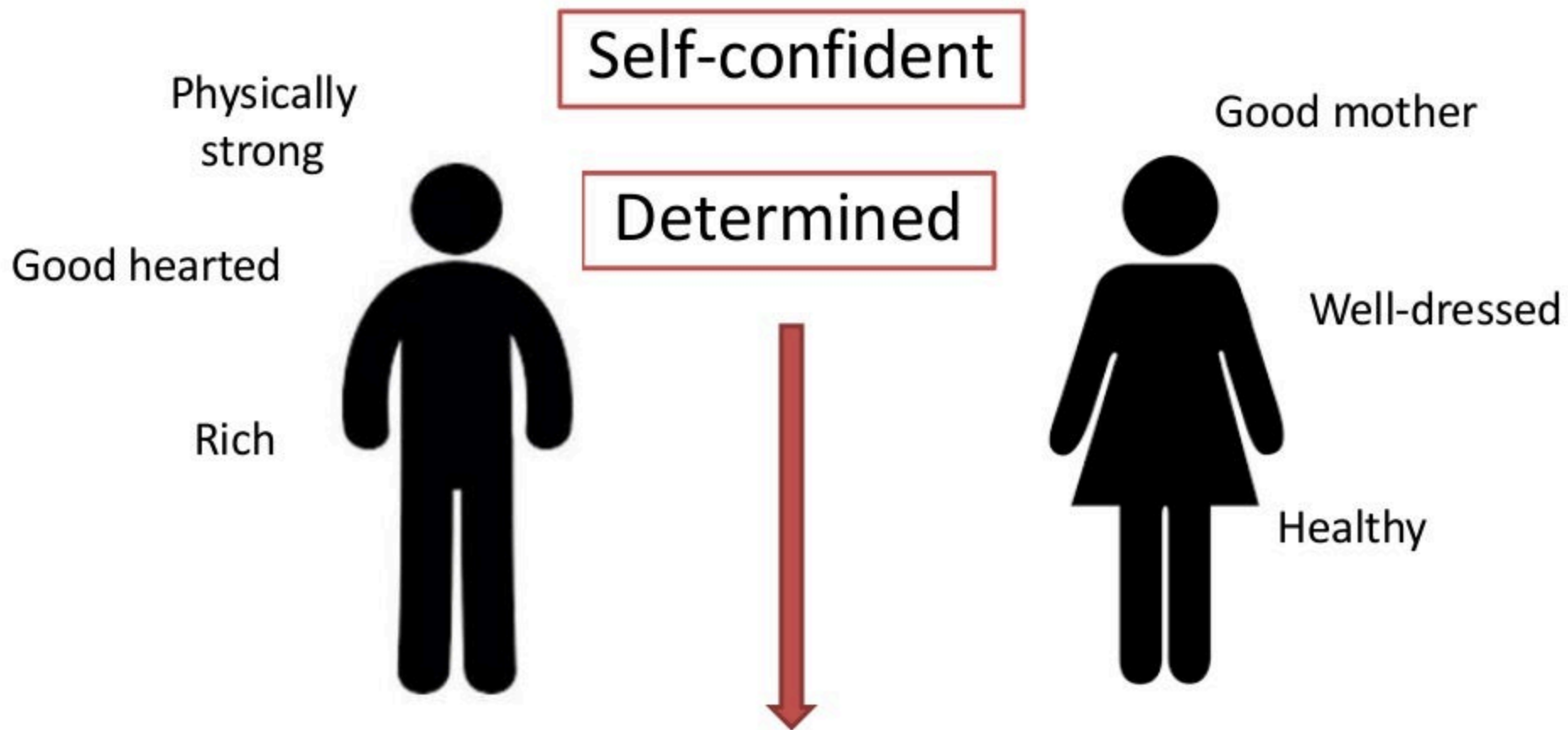
‘Empowerment of individual women is partly **involuntary** and **constituted through the empowerment of significant people** - particularly men - associated with them.

When a person in the family becomes empowered in the eyes of the community then the whole family is considered empowered simply through association with that person’



*2. Power through personal
characteristics and inter-relational
gender norms*

Characteristics of empowered wo/man vis-à-vis gender roles – Kenya



For man: E. characteristics generally valuable

For woman: valuable for E. **only if** they do not impair her ability to be a 'good wife', 'good mother'...

Characteristics of empowerment and gender roles

Helps community



Self-confident

Determined



Good mother

Good wife...

Key message 2

“A self-confident but disrespectful wife cannot be an empowered woman”

‘Empowerment is affected by a complex interplay between an individual holding characteristics of empowerment and the compatibility of these characteristics with locally sanctioned social roles’



Women's empowerment = possessing key characteristics of empowerment **IF** abiding by **household-level** inter-relational norms

Men's empowerment = possessing key characteristics of empowerment + better if abiding by **community-level** inter-relational norms

3. Power through community judgment

Empowerment as a zero-sum - Tanzania

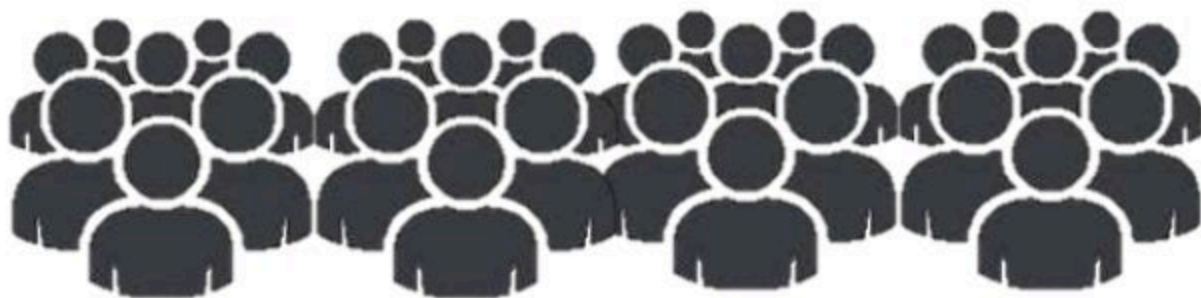


Empowerment as a zero-sum - Tanzania



Key message 3

‘An individual is accorded an ‘empowered’ or ‘disempowered’ status through the **assessment by community members** of the alignment between an individual's ‘gender performance of social roles’ and locally valid gender norms’

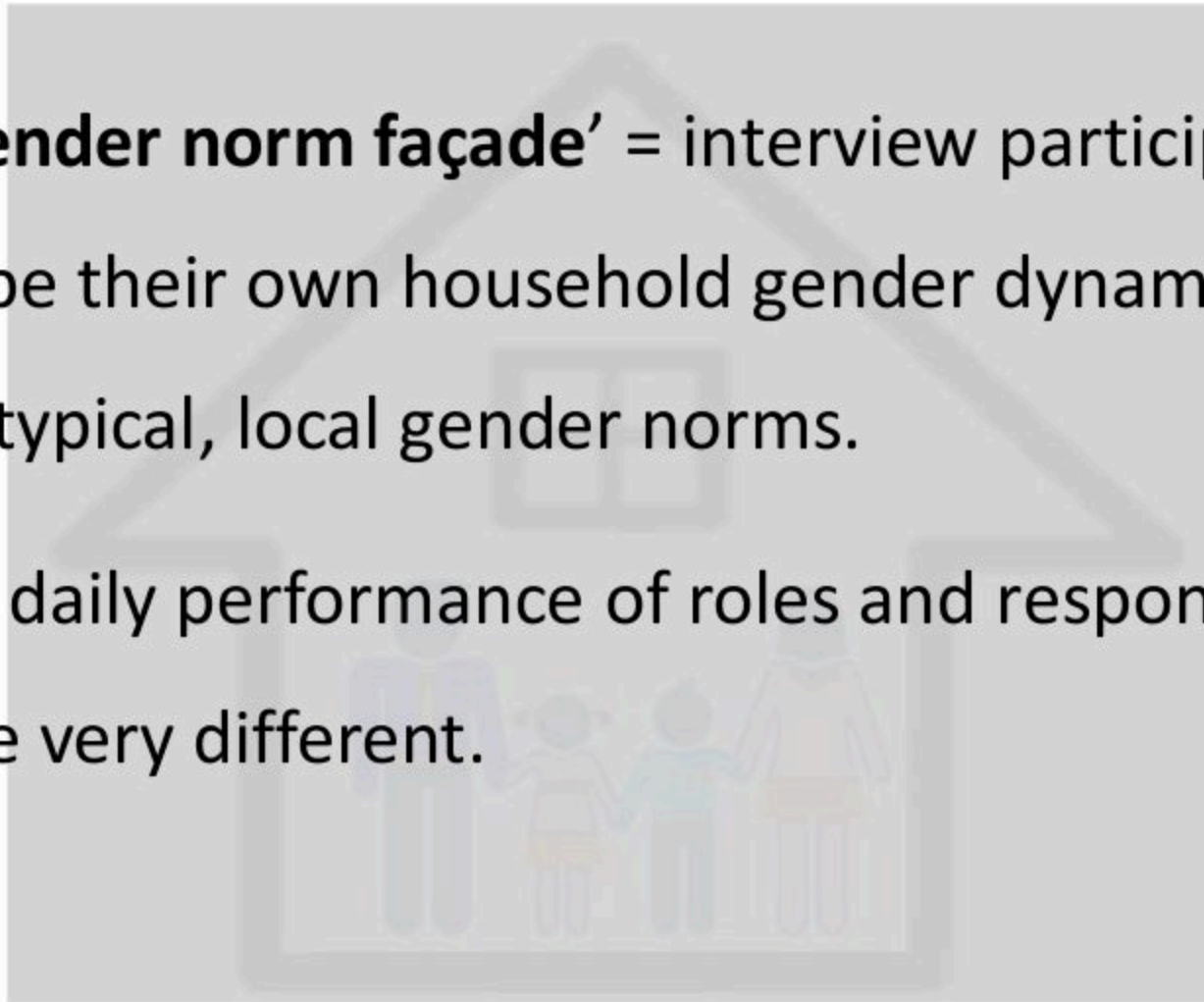


4. The gender norms façade

Gender norms façade: strategy to ensure community approval

‘the gender norm façade’ = interview participants describe their own household gender dynamics using stereotypical, local gender norms.

Actual daily performance of roles and responsibilities may be very different.

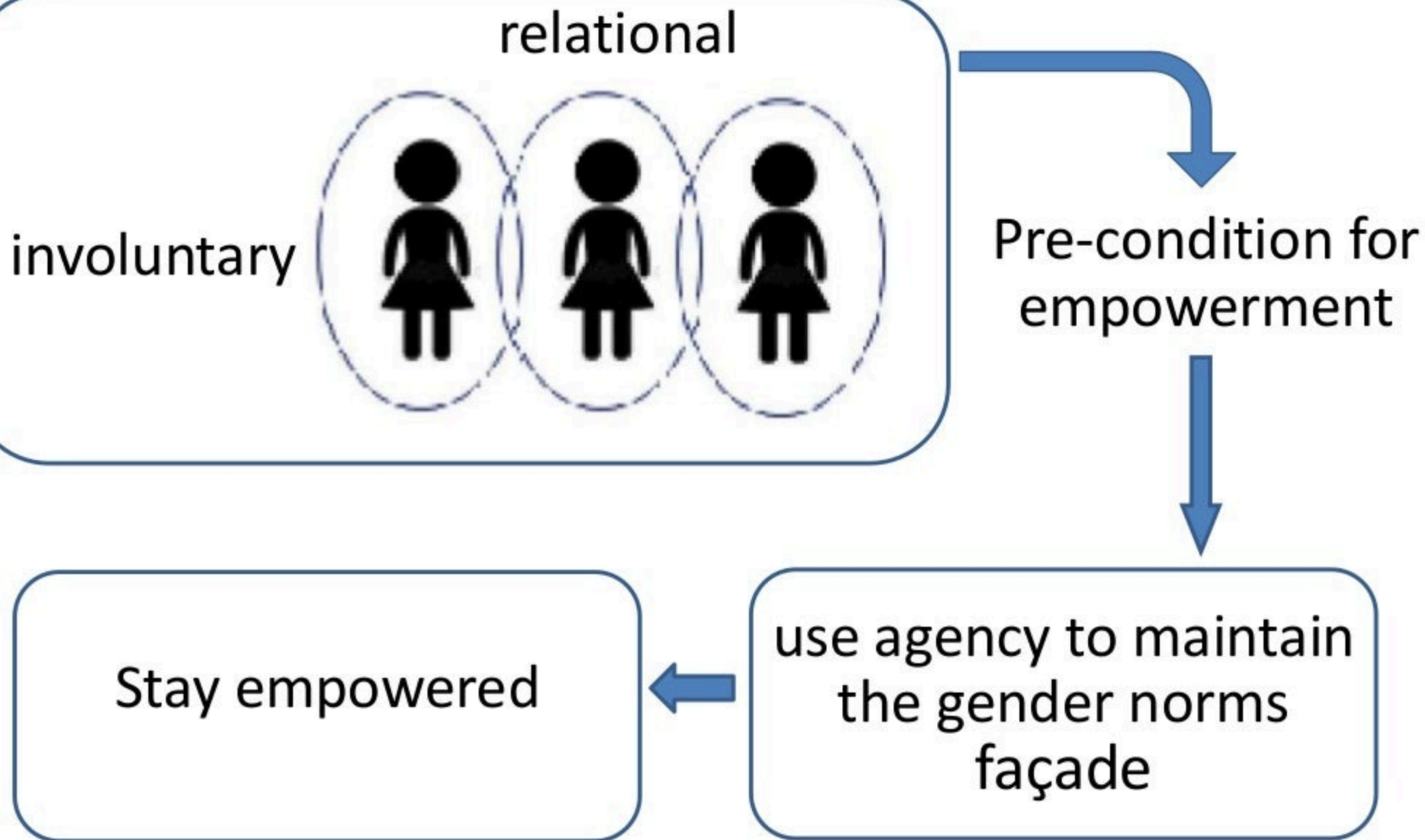


Key message 4

Gender norms façade helps:

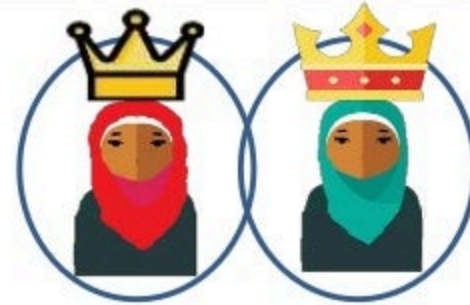
- ➔ Accommodate necessary changes in gender norms
- ➔ Avoid challenging gender norms openly
- ➔ Ensure community approval
- ➔ Respondents to be agents of change

From Power Through to Empowerment

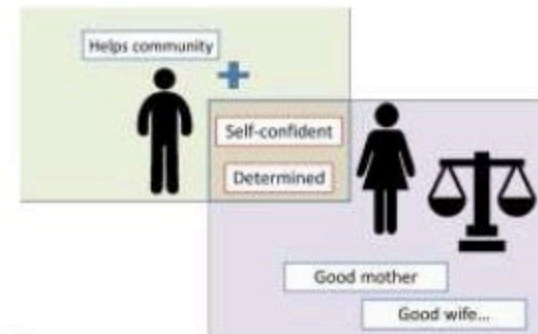


Summary: 4 key points...

1. Empowerment of individual is partly constituted through empowerment of significant others



2. Empowerment entails 'right' personal characteristics and ability to conform to gender norms when relating to others



3. Actualization of empowerment is affected by community judgment



4. Gender norm façade: Respondents show that their household gender dynamics conform to gender norms



Concluding remarks: what power through entails

1. Women's empowerment needs to be situated within gender dynamics – focus on WE only, may disempower
2. Empowerment \neq a zero-sum game
3. Empowerment \neq an absolute; it depends on how individuals, hhs, community interpret change
4. 'Household empowerment' vis-à-vis the community
5. Gender norms façade leveraged strategically to support women's empowerment
6. Empowering men as a means to empower women simply will not work. Empowered men can provide an opening for women's own empowerment. However, empowering women purposefully remains critical.



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Animal scientist, Nobel Prize Laureate for Physiology or Medicine—1996

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