Gender empowerment in the development economics literature: the language of choice, preferences and agency

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Gender empowerment in the development economics literature: 
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by 
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Acknowledgements

This will be a long.
My senior project in some sense is the weekly conversations that took planning between my advisor and I in the past 8 months. I came out of each of those meetings feeling inspired, confident and excited about my work. This is the effect that Sanjaya has had on my academic life since I first took his class called Asian Economic History in my sophomore year. Thank you for keeping me motivated, having faith in me and my project, and keeping up with my tardiness.

I guess I decided to write about gender empowerment out of an academic interest. That summer before my senior year, I had been introduced to gender studies for the first time in professor Mackintosh's class, and I came back to bard eager to learn more and possibly make a senior project out of it. But giving it a second thought, this can't be the whole reason why. If I were to name a few people that made my time at bard what it was, it would always come down to several incredible women, who came into my life at bard at different times, and left a mark on me that will stay for a life time. So there has to be a correlation (I'm clearly making up for a lack of economics in my project). They were a few fine men too, but they can wait.

Although I don't have a space to thank all of them, I want them to thank at least a few. I will never be able to write down how much Manishka's help has meant to me over these past 4 years. Because she has helped me through almost everything I could imagine. She even would reach out to me before I realized I needed help. In my mind, she will always be in Bard, and I will always remember this place through her.

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I have written this project using my words and ideas, except otherwise indicated. I have subsequently attributed each word, idea, figure, and table which are not my own to their respective authors. I am aware that paraphrasing is plagiarism unless the source is duly acknowledged. I understand that the incorporation of material from other works without acknowledgment will be treated as plagiarism. I have read and understand the Bard statement on plagiarism and academic honesty as well as the relevant pages in the Student Handbook.¹

Pranay Panday
May 3rd 2017

Abstract

In my project, I try to trace how our present understanding of gender empowerment is formed, and how mainstream economics literature has accommodated feminist contributions to the concept. I look at neoclassical household models, feminist critiques of the same models, foundational ideas on gender empowerment, and finally the current development economics literature on empowerment. I find that the concept of choices and preferences, and in particular the formation of preferences, is central to understanding gender empowerment. I deduce that a) empowerment is both a process and an outcome, b) that the end goal of empowerment is the access to resources as well as individual agency, and c) that empowerment as a process, in the intermediary stages, means that women play an active role in defining and creating the opportunities that lead them to be empowered. In the current political participation literature, I find that the assumption of fixed, individual preferences is losing its quality of being central to understanding economic behavior.

Keywords: individual preferences, empowerment, gender, development

JEL Classifications: I14, I24, I32, I38, J13, J16, O15
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Introduction:

Gender empowerment has become the "buzzword" in the development economics literature, but despite how prevalent this notion is, there is little “clarity” and consistency over what empowerment implies in “economic terms,” and what theories help us understand the concept (Baltiwala 1997). Gender and power are two subtopics that emerge in the study of empowering women. My understanding of power in this paper comes from Kabeer (1999), who defines it as “an ability to make choices that are of value.” Empowerment then becomes the process by which we acquire this ability. (p. 436) But by thinking about power in the dimension of choices, I can also draw a link to standard neoclassical economics, which describes behavior through the idea of a rational choice. I trace how our understanding of power and gender has evolved within economic theory, and also how far it has incorporated feminist conceptions of the two terms. For example, earlier household models (Becker 1976, 1981) see gender in biological terms. Yet in my final chapter, Stern et al. (2005) talks about how gender roles can be changed, as we change preferences. Feminist contribution to economics, as I discuss in this paper, has focused on how the preferences are formed, situated individual behavior in their social and political context (of gender, race, and class), and suggested that gender roles, and essentially

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1 There are several understandings of gender, it can be understood along biological lines, as a product of sex-role socialization, or something that humans perform and construct. Biological determinism suggests that there are essential differences between men and women, which also informs a biological division of labour in Becker’s (1976, 1981) unitary household models. The sex-role socialization theory highlights that gender is not innate, what we learn about masculinity and femininity is determined by society from very early on. We are a product of our environment largely shaped by our family or society’s expectations of our sex roles. However, this theory can takes us as passive agents, takes away the agency and ability aspect to change behavior. (Tcherneva 2016) We also can separate gender from sex, where sex refers to one’s biological differences, and gender is the “social construction of [a person’s] sexual identity” (Barker). Finally, men and women can be actively involved in the construction of gender. Butler (2009) highlights that gender has a performative aspect, it becomes “a result of something we do, or how we perform our identities in day to day lives.” But gender is also more than just our personal feelings or expression, it operates within cultural and political institutions. We perform our gender roles as a way to conform and reproduce the “ideal” norm. (as cited in Steans 2013, p. 7-46)
identities can be changed, by changing institutions and norms that create seemingly fixed ideas and images about gender roles (Bourdieu 1977). The concept of choices and preferences, and in particular the formation of preferences, is therefore central to understanding gender empowerment.

The neoclassical household models give us an initial framework for understanding gender relations. In subsequent bargaining models, the inequitable share of income and resources also reveals the power relations that exist in a household. In the unitary household models, income and resources are pooled and distributed by an altruistic head of the household, because preferences are uniform. Therefore, these models do not address the gender inequalities that exist within a household. The intra-household bargaining models allow for individual preferences and gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, which mirrors our social reality more precisely. Power can be linked to an ability to bargain in household resource allocation and having a voice in decision making. Bargaining ability is also determined by external factors, and this brings in the influence of social norms and institutions into our analysis of decision making. However social norms, at this point, are still exogenous to the bargaining processes (Agarwal 1997). They are given and not changeable.

The intra-household bargaining models make the assumption of individual preferences, based on the neoclassical rational choice theory. Because people come into the household with fixed and given preferences, the model is concerned with the constraints facing a household, in terms of choices, prices and costs. Preferences are central to this essay on gender empowerment because it is preferences of people that define their wants and needs and ultimately guides them to make valuable and strategic choices (Kabeer 1999). Feminist economists, and most notably
Amartya Sen, argues that the neoclassical model does not consider the ways preferences are formed. Sen (1990) suggests that preferences are formed under the influence of “social norms and social experiences” (as cited in Peter 2005, p. 21) so the issue with the conventional model is to do with the “formation of the problem itself” (Sen 1990, p. 113).

Preferences, are not always individual, and certainly do not remain fixed. This also means that when we rely on our individual tastes and preferences to make certain choices (choices where we try to maximize utility), we are making a subjective assessment. We have a subjective assessment of how we are faring, i.e individual preferences. If we have a weak understanding of our wellbeing, because subjective aspects are shaped by social norms, beliefs, and ability to express our needs, then the outcome of the bargaining process will be less favorable towards the person who attaches less value to their wellbeing (Beneria 2009). Sen (1999, 1990) pushes us towards a more objective measure of assessing individual welfare, through his idea of capabilities.

In Sen's reasoning, women have false or incorrect perceptions, and might conflate their self-interests with the interests of the family, they are socialized into becoming more altruistic. But how do false perceptions come about? And on what basis are they false? Some feminists, such as Kabeer (1999) and Agarwal (1997), have argued that perceptions cannot be false, because how we form our needs and desires come through the context of our day to day social and material reality, and also through social norms and beliefs or a “deeper level of reality” (Kabeer 1999, p. 441). This is referring to Bordieu’s (1977) theory of “doxa” (p. 159),

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2 I argue in chapter two that while Sen does imply that women have false or incorrect perceptions, the difference between his and other feminists understandings of preference formation, is still in language, and not theory. Sen also believes that preferences form because of our social norms and lived experiences, this is the reasoning some of the feminists give to why perceptions cannot be false, they are real, because they are based on lived experiences. [cite]
the idea that there are parts of our culture and traditions that have semblance of being fixed, but in reality, they can be changed. Also, while women’s false perceptions can be shaped by norms, norms themselves are shaped by lived realities, which are not fixed, and so norms are endogenous (Agarwal 1997). Norms can therefore be negotiated and contested over. We can bargain over social norms and create new social realities. So if the norms being contested and bargained over are gender norms, what we are doing is essentially expanding the choice set available to a woman so she will have more possibilities that are socially acceptable.

What all of this implies, is that there is not a simple relationship between power and choices, because power does not only operate through choices, but also through preferences and the choices those preferences makes (Kabeer 1999, p 442). Preferences are formed by people's "social experiences and social norms"(Sen 1990, as cited in Peter). So if people are implicated in an inequitable power relationship, the choices that they make might be in line with their preferences. But here, we cannot simply take power to derive from people's ability to make a choice. In Chapter 3, I give an example about a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in India (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004), which measured the types of complaints that are lodged and the public goods that are provided, when women are chiefs of their village councils, through a reservations policy for women and minorities. The reservation policy in India mandates that at least a third of the elected seats in all village councils be reserved for women, and in a third of the village councils, only women are able to be run as chiefs (or Pradhans) of the council. When women are leaders, the authors find that they provide public goods in line with the preferences of women voters.
But these public goods, do nothing to change prevailing gender roles and do not have a "transformative" impact (Kabeer 1999, p. 451). Women might still be in a state of "doxa" where they leave the inequities that blight their lives, unquestioned. To move towards a more "critical" state of consciousness, where they critically think about and evaluate their position, Kabeer (1999) writes that there needs to be an "availability of alternatives at the discursive level" (p. 441). I understand this as women having an ability to imagine themselves doing more things than they thought they were capable of, seeing more to themselves then they thought was possible. These are ideas that I come across in Sen (1990, 1999), Kabeer (1999), Agarwal (1997), Batliwala (1994) Stern (1999), Appadurai (2004), and Cornwall (2016). In particular, Kabeer’s (1999) notion of "alternatives... at the discursive level” echoes Sen's (1990, 1999) capability approach, where to analyze a policy outcome, what matters is not what you chose but the choices that you had, and could've chosen otherwise. These choices can be both material and imagined. The idea of discursive alternatives, and acquiring an ability to envision different possibilities to oneself, is central to early feminist concepts of gender empowerment as well, where empowerment taught women about their oppression, and how to assert themselves (Batliwala 1994).

I provide a more concrete example of this idea, in the third chapter, in another RCT from West Bengal concerning reservations for women. Beaman et al. (2012) find that reservations have a long term, role model effect, by changing the aspirations of parents, and their daughters, about what women are capable of, and this leads to an observed difference in education attainment of girls. The significance of this finding, is that the reservations do not cause a change in any educational or labour market opportunities for adolescent girls. The only channel through
which parents were able to alter their perceived gender roles, and girls were able to see more to
themselves as a result, was by watching women occupy spaces (such as chiefs of their village
councils) that they could not imagine them in before.

These findings from Beaman et al. (2012) are also the effect of a change in preferences of
parents as well as girls. Change of preferences is one of the key dynamics of empowerment for
Stern et al. (2005). When people are empowered, their “social and economic” conditions may
have changed, (p. 243) but there is also a change in what they prefer, want, or aspire to be. But
how do we empirically separate an change in preference effects from change in information
effect? (p. 252) In standard (neoclassical) economic analysis, an increase in the attainment of
education for girls could be explained by a the fact that labour market opportunities for girls has
increased, or parents have more information on the returns to education. Duflo (2012), in her
literature review of gender empowerment, provides this as an example of how development can
lead to women's empowerment. These are important channels, and for Stern et al. (2005)
“relaxing the external constraints” facing women is one of the aspects of empowerment (p. ).
However, in this instance, Beaman et al. (2012) show that there was no change in labour market
opportunities from reservations, and the study also control for any effects that educational and
labour market attainments of young adults would have had on parents of adolescent daughters
(since these parents would have looked to that group to receive information about the returns to
education).

Yet we still see a potential for a change in gender roles, as parents are able to imagine
their daughters in newer roles, and the gender gap for education attainment decreases. If an
individual's preferences are socially constructed, this sets forth a positive feedback mechanism
for girls themselves, who are able to see a different role for themselves by observing other women occupy a new and public decision space, and for parents, who begin to change their perceptions of their daughters.

But is this case a reflection of gender empowerment? Who is being empowered: the daughter, the parents, or the women leaders? And most importantly, what does an empowered woman look like?

I conclude chapter 2 with writing about the implications of critiques that have come out of the bargaining models, and what it means for gender empowerment. I try and bring in together primarily the works of Sen (1990, 1999), Agarwal (1997), Batliwala (1994), and Kabeer (1999). Empowerment is widely viewed, across different literatures, as both an end in itself and a process (Kabeer 1999, Duflo 2012, World Bank 2012). But I want to emphasize that the end goal of empowerment should reflect access and control of resources, as well as individual agency, where agency is defined as an individual’s ability to "define their goals and act on them" (Kabeer 1999, p. 438), and have the freedom to chose between alternative realities. The idea that preferences can be changed, or “endogenous preferences,” is at the heart of this process of empowerment (Stern 2005, p. 250). In the process of empowerment, an individuals self-perceptions and beliefs of themselves can be changed, so they are more in line with their own self-interests, goals and aspirations. Since preferences are socially constructed, policy intervention should not just be at the level of the individual, but at the level of the community as well. At the beginning of chapter

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3 This definition comes from Kabeer, who sees resources and agency as two of the three dimensions of empowerment. Resources and agency come together to constitute as achievement outcomes, the third dimension of empowerment. Resources and agencies, together, can also be thought of as Sen’s (1990, 1999) idea of capabilities, which highlight the potential for different ways of “being and doing” which is what Sen calls “functioning.” (as cited in Kabeer 1999, p. 438). Capabilities can also be thought of as freedom to live the type of lives that value (Sen 1999).
two, for example, I talk about how individuals are social beings, therefore the way to empower an individual is to understand their relationship with the society that they are in, and how it affects them both positively and negatively.

Ultimately, there are different ways of "being and doing," (Sen 1990) but the choices we have are constrained by our social norms. We can provide platforms that can be used by communities to change social norms and for individuals to change their preferences (Stern 2005, p. 262). In the end, each woman will have a larger set of choices that are socially acceptable or sanctioned. However, disempowerment is simply not having the ability to choose, but in line with individual agency, it is also not having a role, or a space to contribute to the formation and negotiation of social norms. In other words, empowerment cannot be given to women (Cornwall 2016). Empowerment comes from being able to define one’s own preferences, so women should have a constructive role in what those choices are.

Given this, where do we place the case of about women leaders acting as role models to girls? The village council is an important site in which decisions for the community are carried out, especially in terms of public goods provisioning (Kabeer 2005). Just having these reservations achieves the goal of having women in decision making spaces. They are not only merely “present,” but they are also active and “effective participants,” (Stern 2005, p. 105) as some of the earliest studies show (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004), where having women as leaders lead to provisioning of public goods that are in line with what women in the community wanted. But are they expanding the choice sets for other women by simply giving them what they want? Here, the Beaman et al. (2012) study points us to believe that having women in those spaces, does expand the choice sets for others, and in particular adolescent girls, by changing
norms about women's role and what they can achieve. The resources aspect of empowerment, in Kabeer's (1999) understanding, means that access to a resource should not only translate to an actual choice, but a “potential” for a choice (p. 443). While there is a positive effect on the education attainment for girls, an access to more educational resources, should not alone constitute as being empowering. The fact that aspirations of parents change positively, towards their daughters to be a Pradhan one day, or to marry only after 18 years of age, show that these girls also have an access to a potential set of choices in the future, which they did not have before.
Empowerment can be seen through dimension of choices, where power comes from an “ability to make choices” (Kabeer 1999, p. 436). Power can also be seen in terms of “control over material or intellectual resources” (Baltiwala 1994, p. 129), which figures into an individual's ability to make choices. In conventional economics, our understanding of how choices are made, can be explained by ideas of individual preferences, rational choice and utility theory. However, an individual who makes a rational, utility maximizing choice, does not exist in a vacuum, the to a family, is either male or female bodied. The neoclassical household models, offer us a framework for how these different entities make choices, or are denied of making choices. Choices become materialized in the way that labour is divided, or resources are distributed among families. These household models reveal the way that individuals are related to one another, and in particular, they bring forward gender relations (Agarwal 1997, p. 1). In subsequent bargaining models, the inequitable share of income and resources, also reveal the power relations that exist in a household. What we need to consider by studying these models, is that if theory becomes a way by which we come to see gender relations, then to what degree does theory inform policy measures, especially ones that affect the lives of women. This is especially true with how centrally the idea of fixed and individual preferences figures into the neoclassical household models. This chapter concludes with a feminist critique of the household models, which continues onto the following chapter.

\[4\] which is prevalent the current mainstream literature empowerment, as a framework to understand economic behavior (Duflo 2012).
Biological division of labour

In Gary Becker's unitary household model, one's gender, determines what one does in the household, and the market. His understanding of gender is in terms biological differences between men and women. Becker (1981) introduced the unitary household theory to model the behavior of families. At the core, it assumes that the way members in a family make decisions on shared things is by acting as if they are one, unitary household. This means that they all have the same preferences. There is one utility function for the household, and everyone cooperates in a way that maximizes the household's utility. Each individual specializes, and allocates their labour according to comparative advantage. It determines who stays at home and contributes to household labour, who participates in the labour market and earns an income, and how much members of the household invests in their human capital. Comparative advantage is determined by each of the member’s earnings potential and gender differences.

Comparative advantage made on biological lines also suggests that it is not possible to substitute men in the household instead of women. This means that men only have a comparative advantage in the market. But market wages are also lower for women, compared to men,

in part because they spend less time investing on the market capital, and invest more in household capital, therefore have greater productivity gains in the household compared to the market (p. 26). Especially during peak child rearing years for women, their time is worth more at home, than in the labour force (p. 27).\(^5\) Though child bearing is a biological role, and rearing, or motherhood, can arguably be socially constructed, the heavy biological commitment women

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\(^5\) There is also a heteronormative bias in this model, because according to the specialization of labour idea along gender lines, heterosexual households will also be more optimal and efficient than same sex households, because “households with only men or only women… are unable to profit from the sexual difference in comparative advantage” (Becker 1981 p. 23)
make when they have children, which is an investment of their time and labour that could have been used elsewhere, gives them the incentive to make this investment worth it, whereas men, who do not invest into the child bearing, have less of an incentive to stay committed to the bearing process of children. Becker (1981) writes in his own words,

“most women have been reluctant to commit so much time, effort, emotion, and risk to producing children, without considerable control over rearing.” (p. 29)

He then points to evidence from developing and developed countries, that show labour force participation by mothers reduce the health of their children. Therefore, since such “sexual differences in specialized investments reinforce any biologically induced sexual division of labour,” women’s incentives to bearing children also reinforce their biological role of rearing. This means that it is hard to distinguish between biologically and environmentally determined divisions of labour between men and women (p. 23).6

If we were to treat power as an ability to make a choice, in this model, women have more power over men because they have a choice between household and market work. Albelda et al. (2009) point out that if we were to “reverse” the pattern of specialization outlined by Becker, where men stayed at home doing household work while women specialized primarily in the market doing paid work, then the household “would be worse off.” In Becker’s analysis, families are more efficient in this model when they allocate labour according to their biologically

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6 Becker’s theory of the household decision making is the first to bring in gender into neoclassical models of labour supply, because it treats the household as a production unit, and the amount of time a member allocates in the household for production, will also affect their decision to supply labour to the market. This is different from the previous labour supply models, which suggested that there is a trade off between paid labour and leisure. (King 1999, p. 502) However, if income of the primary member of the household increases, then labour supply between family members is adjusted. The dependent, according to Becker’s idea of comparative advantage determined by sex, will usually be the wife in the household. If the primary earner, the husband, sees a rise in their income, then the dependent will adjust to this increase, by cutting down their own working in either the market, or the household, and opt for more leisure. (Alderman et al. 1995; Pollak 2002).
determined comparative advantage (p. 72). Furthermore, by Becker’s reasoning, women simply have to give up less market wages to do household work while men have to give up more market wages to do household work, and are also far less productive at household work (Barker 1999, p. 393). At the end of the day, women actually have a “productive option outside of the labour market” in the home, which is “not readily available to men” (Albelda et al. 2009, p. 73). Women’s empowerment cannot be understood through the unitary household model if we take power as an ability to make choices because by this definition of power women are more privileged in a unitary household.

**Problems with methodology**

At the center of neoclassical analysis was the idea of methodological individualism, that an economy is comprised of a group of individual rational economic agents, who maximize their utility, given a constraint. Pujol (1992) highlights that Becker’s household model tried to account for inconsistencies that the neoclassical model would have presented otherwise concerning families. Families are at odds with the neoclassical model, because if parents need to act altruistically and unselfishly towards their children, as they would need to when investing in their human capital, this contradicts assumption of self interests. But in Becker’s model, a household acts as a single rational agent, where income is pooled and an altruist cares for the wellbeing of the family, transferring purchasing power to each of the members of the household. Since the family has a unified set of interests, these transfers or the conditionality of the transfers, should then induce the other selfish, egoistic members of the households to align and

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7 This is also how the gender pay gap is justified in neoclassical economics, women could work but they will chose occupations that might not be high paying but are “compatible with her household responsibilities” (Barker 1999, p. 393).
match their interests with those of the altruist, benefactor of the household (the father or husband). (Woolley 1999, p. 328)

If households operate as one unit, then income and resources is pooled, and distributed optimally. Parents, or in particular the altruist (the one who provides income for others), must then behave in an altruistic way or display altruistic preferences. The altruists wants to maximize the collective happiness (or utility) of the household. The altruist’s utility maximizing function is a function of their own utility and the consumption function of the recipients, who unlike the benefactor (altruist), act in an egoistic way and their utility only depends on their own consumption. If the recipient, for example a child, is a “rotten child,” and tries to raise their own consumption at the expense of other members of the family, then the altruist can simply reduce the size of their transfers, so the recipient will never have the incentive in the first place to increase their consumption at the cost of others. In this way, the preferences of the altruist and preferences of the household come to match. (Alderman et al. 1995, p. 4)

Before Becker’s formulation of an altruistic household head, James Mill had justified disenfranchisement of women with the reasoning that they were politically represented by their "fathers, brothers, and husbands," and therefore did not need to vote themselves, and Paul Samuelson, argued that altruism and mutual affection made family act as one unit. (Folbre 2009, p. 297) This relationship, in Becker, is modeled both between parents and children, and husband and wife. As Folbre (2009) points out, although the language in Becker’s writings is gender neutral, there is an inversion of the traditionally held connection between femininity and altruism, which provides connotations of caring, selflessness, and is usually associated as a motherly attribute. (p. 298) Barker (1999) suggests that the particular family that Becker invokes
in his model, though not explicitly implying that the household head is a man, still reflects a patriarchal, Victorian ideal. Folbre (1980) uses patriarchy to denote a system where father’s have power over their children, as well as their wives. In a broader sense, patriarchal societies reproduce sexual division of labour, sustain the concentration of women in lower paid and unpaid, reproductive work. (as cited in Matthaei 1999, p. 592) Becker’s model inadvertently reveals the patriarchal underpinnings of the neoclassical model, by highlighting the dependency of women on men.

Folbre (2009) also critiques the assumptions of efficiency that the unitary model is based on. Since decisions are made in the best interest of all the members of a household, the distribution of resources within the households is always efficient. In Becker's unitary household model, the rotten kid theorem explains how even the rotten, selfish kids, cannot act in an egoistic way, that would take away someone else’s utility to increase their own. Rosenzweig and Schultz (1982) find that in households in India, less food is allocated to females, because families depend more on the future expected incomes of their male children. Folbre draws out a paradox here, health and nutrition of the female members are sacrificed, there is a higher mortality of females compared to males, but for the sake of efficiency, which leaves the household better off because the distribution of resources is optimal in relation to the household as a whole. The same way government spending crowds out investment from the private sector, in the neoclassical model, making the effect of the spending redundant, if there is unanticipated increase in the resources available to one family member, then others would simply shift some of their own resources away from that member and neutralize the change. (p. 298)
Becker (1976) assumed that individuals are rational, there is information symmetry, so "individuals know what they want and can get away with what they want as long as they are free to choose". Folbre (2009) suggests that very "confidence" by which Becker makes this claim, in a way “justifies the gender inequality” that exist in the model, because it assumes that women themselves choose the jobs that pay less, because they feel more responsible than men to allocate their time outside of market work, towards family care, because they enjoy it more. For mothers especially, they get a higher utility out of the bearing of their children over fathers. The inequality in wages and at home is voluntary for the unitary household model.

Folbre (1986) also writes that the assumption that women and female children “voluntarily” relinquish leisure, education, and food” would only be plausible if “they were in a position to demand their fair share,” therefore by taking into “women’s lack of economic power” and “unequal allocation of household resources” into consideration “lends the bargaining power (collective model) approach much of its persuasive appeal” (p. 261, as cited in Alterman et al. 1995, p. 5).

I have already mentioned above that the idea of a biologically determined comparative advantage, gives more power to women over men, which misses the actual reality of women's lives in households, and outside. Especially in the developing world, a free choice for paid market work may not be an option for women. The concept of empowering women cannot fully enter the unitary household model, because it does not address the gender inequality that persists in the intra household distribution of resources. In fact, inequities in distribution of income and resources (or even biologically determined division of labour) is justified because it is a product of rational, individual choices. Income and resources are pooled, and the distribution is always
Pareto-efficient, no one is left better off. It becomes impossible to empower an individual in the household exclusively, and increase their wellbeing. The only thing we can do about it, is empowering the household, where wellbeing of the household as a whole should increase. But the distribution of resources, even if it is inequitable, remains the same, because it represents the most efficient allocation.

**Bargaining households and individual preferences**

The unitary model does not address the potential that distribution of resources among household members can be unequal. Thomas (1990), for example, finds that unearned income in control of the mother, which is outside of the control of the father (altruist) and has a greater positive effect on the health of the household than the income that is earned and controlled by the father. An alternative way of approaching household decision making is by assuming that individual members of households do not have the same preferences, and have to negotiate their difference in preferences. Intra-household bargaining models highlight that households reconcile with these difference in preferences by either “relying on non-cooperative relations” or by relying on “cooperative solutions” (Alderman et al. 1995, p. 5). The process, or game, which determines these outcomes is bargaining.8

Though the notion of power is not explicitly mentioned in this literature, power can be seen as the ability to bargain, and make decisions. Empowerment can be seen as the process through which women acquire the ability to bargain, or make decisions for themselves and others. We can use the bargaining models therefore, as a framework to conceptualize women’s empowerment. People's bargaining strengths, measuring their ability to bargain, is dependent on

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8 Though the earlier bargaining models still hold on to the idea of matching preference and Pareto-efficiency, they are dropped with succeeding models (Agarwal 1997).
“threat point” or a “fall back position.” (Pollak 2002, p. 28-29) The higher the fall back position, for example, the more resources one has to fall back on, and therefore the more one can bargain with. The fall back position is socially determined by factors outside of the household (Pollak 2002).

The first intra-household bargaining models are cooperative in nature and resemble unitary models. Manser and Brown (1980) and McElroy and Horney (1981), use a game theory scenario to show that household members will bargain over a pooled income. An individual’s bargaining ability is determined by their fall back positions, which is a function of outside options such as non-wage income, legal structure governing marriage, or parental wealth. They determine what the individual’s options would be outside of the household, the welfare they would receive, if they were to exit the household. (Doss 2013; Agarwal 1997)

Cooperative models share the reasoning with unitary models that sometimes it makes economic sense to come together and act as one unit. Unitary models are a particular type of cooperative models, where preferences of individuals are the same, and the income and resources are also pooled as a result (Quisumbing et al. 2000). Becker (1976) writes that marriage is voluntary, and only when the utility gained by marrying is higher than remaining single, do individuals marry. According to the theory of household production, the utility gained by activities such as “companionship, love, and health status” (p. 206) from marriage, can be higher and induce members to rely on cooperation. In the absence of perfect substitution for men and women between labour market and home production, men and women gain from marriage because as single people, “they cannot produce equivalents of the optimal combination of inputs achieved by married couples” (Becker 1976, p. 210). In a cooperative household too, a
household comes into being, when the opportunity cost of forming a household is low, or where there are more benefits of being in a union with someone or living inside a household unit. The cooperative models differ from unitary models in terms of distribution of resources, and it is power differentials between members, that determine the distribution of resources. In contrast to Becker’s altruistic model, each partner has a utility function that is based on their own consumption, and not partly on the partner’s. This means they also have different preferences. In essence, members will bargain over the allocation of pooled resources and income, and a optimal outcome will be determined by their bargaining ability. (Quisumbing et al. 2000)

But the significance of these models is that if members are not able to reconcile with their differences (in preferences), then they have to settle for a lower utility level, which is represented by their individual fall back position or threat point (Pollak 2002, p. 28). This default point, is in a sense, what determines the bargaining power of each members of the household. Therefore, any policy measure to increase the bargaining power of women, and in this model, will have to be targeted at raising this default point. Divorce can represent this threat point if cooperation were to fail. Expenditure patterns will be conditional on who receives or controls income after a divorce, who is better off if they were to exit the household (29). But divorce is a legal institution which exists outside of the household. A threat point, essentially is a function of conditions outside of the household, such as alimony and child support laws, the ability for a woman to return to their natal home after a divorce, or restrictions they face to enter the labour force (Alderman, p. 6). For example, if we suppose men are the primary earners in the household and will retain more income after a divorce, and if there is no availability of welfare programs to divorce or child support obligations for men and women (Pollak 2002, p. 7). We also suppose
that women usually do not have the option of returning to their natal homes because divorces are 
seen as a social stigma. Based on these conditions, we can argue that men have a greater exit 
option, more resources to fall back on (or poses a greater threat to exit the household), than 
women, and therefore will also have a greater bargaining ability or power.

But in the context of developing countries, it is problematic to use divorce as a threat 
point or make the assumption that there is a voluntary choice of marriage. It is possible, and 
especially for women, that they might not have a choice of forming a household and then opting 
to divorce, if the cooperation failed. Society’s view towards unmarried people, might also be a 
reason to get married, and this is not motivated by any economic factors. Lastly, it is unrealistic 
that either households exist in cooperation, or fall apart. (Pollak 2002; Sen 1999)

Lundberg and Pollak (1993) argue that a threat point can also be representative of a non-
cooperative equilibrium with in a marriage, because it is not always an option or “plausible” to 
use divorce as a threat if cooperation were to fail. In many cultures, divorce is also not legally 
“possible” or socially encouraged. Expenditure pattern, and the intra household distribution of 
resources, will instead depend on who “receives or has control over income within marriage,” 
rather than after divorce. This theory of “separate spheres” suggests that household members do 
not always cooperate, they can live in their separate non-cooperative spheres but still find 
advantage in some joint form of consumption, production and activities, which they bargain over. 
For example, there are “household public goods,” where both the husband and wife can 
participate and derive utility out of. By supplying their individual time, income, and labour to 
take care of their children, they don't exclude the other from deriving utility out of this, because 
both of them value the well being of their children. At other times, they remain in the household
and operate in separate spheres, where “gender and social norms,” determine the division of labour, “assign the primary responsibility of some activities to husbands and others to wives.” The fact that women are more commonly expected to be the primary care givers for children is reflective of social and gender norms, “rather than preferences or productivity differences between a husband and wife,” as entailed in the cooperative and unitary household models. (As cited in Pollak 2002, p. 29)

The non-cooperative models, by turning into gender and social norms about division of labour, bring in social norms into the economics of the family.

**Social norms in bargaining household models**

While the unitary household model placed the household in relation to an abstract market, the succeeding bargaining models try and place the household in a wider society by bringing in the influence of norms and institutions. However, norms are given and exogenous to the process of bargaining (Agarwal 1997).

Bakker (1999) directs us to the influence that institutional economics in some strands of neoclassical analysis. Institutional economics gives importance to "norms, cultures, and values" in economic processes. Institutionalist argue, “patterns of behavior and perceptions,” are something that is culturally shared and specific, so that means that markets, rational choice, preferences in work and consumption are not a product of “individual “taste and preferences,” but of cultural patterns and social norms (p. 480). This line of thought echoes strongly throughout feminist critiques of the household model and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Shultz (1995) draws a similar comparison with the work of Esther Boserup, who he writes, underlined the "limitations of development for the advancement of women," in cases
where institutions and culture resist change. He categorizes Boserup (1970) to the tradition within economics that studies the "constraints that social institutions and culture" put for women to achieve as much as men, or acquire as much human capital. (p. 5) Schultz (1995) argues that by looking at gender inequality through the lens of the neoclassical household models, where it assumes the household behaves in an efficient way given it is subject to constrained endowments and market opportunities, leaves out important cultural and social aspects that might shed light on the problem.

In the development economics literature, Boserup (1970) challenges the view that economic growth, modernization, and capital accumulation necessarily benefits women. In the case of modernization of agriculture, women receive less access to resources, such as training, land rights, and education. This is partly because of the colonial and post-colonial impressions of women as being unproductive in agriculture, and not solely from a sexual division of labour. As a result, men end up investing more human capital and are productive in agriculture. In terms of industrial modernization, women have a disadvantage in combining work in the modern, market sector with their reproductive responsibilities at home. Women, and especially older women, also lack the modern professional skills and education to participate outside. (as cited in Shultz 1995, p. 51-60) Boserup's (1970) remedy was therefore to invest more in better education and training of women, challenge perceptions of them as simply housewives, and train them to compete with men in the market place. (as cited in Elson 1999, p. 100)

By participating in the market, women can challenge social norms about what women can and are allowed to do, and increase their bargaining ability in the household. However, Kabeer and Humphrey (1993) highlight that in Boserup (1970), women’s ability to bargain for a greater
access to resources, is still linked to their participation of the market first, which then will bring out social change. (as cited in Bakker 1999, p. 484)

Although the strength of people’s bargaining ability is socially determined, the fact that it is still contingent on who is better off when the marriage breaks, or who receives or controls the money within the marriage, means that social norms only have an affect on fall back positions through the labour market. A women’s ability to bargain, is contingent on her earning’s potential outside of the household, in the market. Here, social norms only have an instrumental role to play, but expansion of the bargaining household (Sen 1990; Agarwal 1997) show that social norms interfere directly with the household. Social norms can be "endogenous" to the bargaining process (Agarwal 1997, p. 15). In a sense, social norms carry their own set of preferences, that are contested with the preferences of individuals in the household. Part of the bargaining process is to negotiate between the preferences of the self and the society’s. This is a subject of concern in the following two chapters.

The problem with individual preferences

The rest of this chapter is devoted to the key assumption of intra-household bargaining models of fixed, individual preferences. The bargaining household models, though departing from the assumptions of Pareto-efficiency, income pooling, and uniform preferences, takes preferences to be outside of the model, and is concerned only with the dimension of choices, prices and costs. There are two people in the intra household bargaining model who have their own individual preferences, are guided by self interests, to cooperate, or not cooperate. How much the outcomes favors our preferences depends on our relative bargaining strengths.
This rationale comes from neoclassical economics, where individual preferences and taste give context to people's choices, and describe the historical and social attitudes that the person embodies. In neoclassical economics, we think in terms of rational choice, given a constraint of some sort. Rational choice suggests that individuals are able to order their preferences, the things they like and dislike, and then proceed to make choices that will maximize their self interest. So an individual, as a rational agent, will be able to rank between different consumption bundles according to their preference, and chooses the bundle with the highest ranking. It is also assumed, that they are capable of expressing their preference between any pair of consumption bundle. The fact that there is a given constraint, means that preferences are independent of the constraints placed on choice, prices, and other costs, and so people will maximize their utility or wellbeing, by taking part in an economic activity where their marginal benefit is equal to the marginal cost. (Barker 1999, p. 571)

The bargaining process is concerned with the constraints facing a household, in terms choices, prices, and cost. For example, a woman's threat-point, which is a measure of her bargaining strength, is the cost borne to a woman versus her husband, if the marriage were to break. A fall back position, is representative of how much control an individual has of income and resources, relative to their partner, within a marriage. (Alderman et al. 1995; Pollak 2002) So to increase one's bargaining strength, through increasing a woman's threat point, is to lessen the cost borne by them, if the marriage were to break. This might be done by increasing women's opportunities outside of the household, through waged work, and making them more financially independent, either through employment or access to land or monetary resources such as loans (Sen 1999, p. 202). Women will subsequently be able to make choices that are more in line to
their individual preferences. Their lived experiences, their beliefs and attitudes, and self perceptions, are reflected in their tastes and preferences.

A challenge within economics, to individual and exogenous preferences, comes from political economists. A political economy view, put forward by Marxists, Keynesians, and Institutionalist, argues that “behavior is not always individual but social” as well, and people are “not just rational, calculating individuals” (Albelda et al. 2009, p. 121-122). In neoclassical analysis, preferences and tastes are not only individual, but are also exogenous and outside of the scope of concern of the "economist's world." But to a political economist, "context is everything" and "outside influences are the most important determinant of what people want to purchase," and therefore of economic transactions. The political economy model, makes preferences endogenous, as well as the object of their study. (p. 124) The "political" enters this framework because political economists treat economic agents as both individuals and members of social groups (based on race, gender, class), and view “important social groups in our society as being related to each other by unequal power and uneven access to resources” (p. 122). This latter point is recognized in the intra household bargaining models to some extent. “Gender relations,” which are relations of power between men and women, are revealed in both the division of labour and resources between men and women, as well as the “ideas and representations” ascribed to each gender (Agarwal 1997, p.1). In the cooperative, intra household models, the cooperative outcomes from the bargaining process, can show us the inequities between men and women, in terms of "who does what, who gets what goods and services, and how each member is treated." Even if the cooperative outcomes are better off than non cooperative outcomes, they can still can favor one part over the other. Increasing the bargaining
strengths of an individual member of the household, pushes the outcomes to favor that member over others. In later, non cooperative models, the household members are in "separate spheres," and cooperate over some joint consumption or production, such as rearing children, while at other times withdraw in to separate, non-cooperative spheres, which is based on division of labour based on socially recognized gender roles, outside of the bargaining process (p. 5).

For Agarwal (1997), while the intra household bargaining models, address some of these gender symmetries and relations of power, in the examples provided above, it says little about the role of "social norms and perceptions," the "effect of the gender differences that exists in the exercise of self interest," and the gender relations outside of the household. (p. 2) This is more in light of the political economist view, that while the bargaining models, reflect some aspects of the power dynamics that exist between men and women, it takes individual preferences as entirely given, and is only concerned with choices, prices, and costs.

On this issue, Agarwal poses the question of what if some “household members do not act in their own interest” and as a result, “do not bargain in their best advantage?” This concern with individual preferences is one of the main critiques to emerge out of the intra household bargaining model. Sen (1990) suggests that the shortfall of the bargaining models is the assumption of “individual preferences,” that we are able to chose or have greater liking for one alternative over others. But for Sen, what the bargaining models do not take into account is the “formation of beliefs and preferences under the influence of social norms and social experiences in general.” (As cited in Peter, p. 21) So the problem with the bargaining models, in the context of gender divisions, “arise not so much from the nature of any particular solution,” suggesting that he does see value in using the bargaining models to explain gender divisions, but rather
“from the formulation of the problem itself,” where individual preferences, rational choice, and self interest form the 'problem' or the basis of intra household bargaining. (Sen 1990, p 133) The bargaining models bring in the possibility of differing preferences and interests, which is why they need to negotiate and bargain. But it does not considered how people end up with different preferences.
Chapter 2: Feminist critiques of the neoclassical household models and feminist notions of empowerment

In the intra-household bargaining models, people came in with their predetermined set of preferences. Preferences are individual and exogenous to the model. But if our preferences, interests, or desires help define what we want and need, and ultimately guide us to make valuable choices, the weakness of the bargaining household models, lies in the fact that it does not consider the ways individual preferences are formed. Preferences are seldom individual. Our preferences are formed from our self perceptions and beliefs, social norms, and our day to day lived experiences. If our self perceptions and beliefs are false, misguided, or inadequate, then this undermines our agency, our ability to define our goals and aspirations, and therefore our ability to make meaningful choices, and bargain for an equitable share of resources.\(^9\)

However, the language of false perceptions does not adequately capture the full picture. If perceptions were false, policy intervention should be at the level of an individual. Sen (1990) suggests that our perceptions are formed by “social norms and social experiences” (as cited in Peter 2005, p. 21). Therefore, I move to the idea that there are alternative, fluid realities, from the ones we live in (Bourdieu 1977; Agarwal 1997; Kabeer 1999). Women are constrained by certain social realities which appear fixed and unchangeable, but in reality, can be contested and bargained over (Agarwal 1994; Kabeer 1997, Bourdieu 1970). Social norms and beliefs are changeable. Likewise, preferences of women, and of others of women (in terms of expected

\(^9\) In line with prevailing ideas of power in feminist literature, that power comes from the ability to make strategic and meaningful choices (Kabeer 1999), or control over material assets and intellectual resources (Batiwal 1997). Agency, is defined by Kabeer (1999), as the ability to define and act on one's goals and aspirations, and in Sen (1999), agency is the freedom to chose the type of lives we have to value.
roles), are also changeable and “endogenous” (Stern 2005, p. 244). Policy intervention should also be aimed at the level of the community, with the objective of changing social norms and preferences, because this is the level at which norms operate (Agarwal 1997).

**False perceptions and individual welfare**

Individuals are social beings, therefore the way to empower an individual is to understand their relationship with the society that they are in, and how it affects them positively and negatively. Sen (1990) suggests that individuals must be socially removed or dis-embedded from their social reality, if they are to truly carry individual preferences. But if we are to accept that individuals are social beings, are a part of a family or a community, then the idea that their preferences are strictly individual loses ground. His idea of a "perceived interest response" suggests that individuals can have a false perception of their interests. In this case, individuals cannot accurately assess how they are faring either. (p. 127)

Like the above mentioned political economists, Sen (1990) also argues that economic agents have “many identities,” such as being a man or a woman, or being a member of a family and community. Therefore, if our “individuality” is compromised of many different identities, and we are constantly implicated in the relations in our families and those outside of it, then our understanding of our “interests, wellbeing, objectives… and legitimate behavior” is subject to the “various and conflicting effects of these diverse identities.”10 When we come to conceptualize individuals as social beings, we can no longer ignore the “strong influence” of “families,” and

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10 This way of understanding an individual, shares parallel to contemporary feminist writers, such as Butler (2009). Through the idea of “precarity,” Butler (2009) suggests that we’re all embodied creatures, and there’s a lived experience of having a body that we all share, which necessitates social relations. Since birth, individuals come together to give care because “a living being may die” and only under conditionality that “the loss of what would matter does the value of life appear” (p. 14). She is suggesting that we don't even come to exists if not for the social support around us, and a body, that is not social, cannot exist.
our societies, on our perception in ways that we can not “formulate any clear notion of our own individual welfare,” our perception of what is good for us, can be subject to influences of others on us.11 (p. 126)

The issue with using using individual preferences, is that it is a "subjective" measure of our wellbeing.12 In the bargaining models, two parties come with their own set of preferences, or in Sen’s words, “clearly perceived interests,” (132) for a desired level of wellbeing or “welfare,” and they try to negotiate an outcome, which is dependent on their bargaining strengths. The “utilitarian tradition,” treats our “mental states as reflections of individual wellbeing,” using the “metrics of happiness and desire,” (Sen 1990, p 127). In summarizing Sen (1990), Beneria (2009) writes that "inadequate perceptions" and "false consciousness" can lead to a “weak understanding of personal wellbeing,” because these subjective elements is shaped by “norms, perceptions of self and others, and ability to articulate personal needs” (p. 212). This is especially true for “deprived groups,” such as women and minorities, who may be “habituated to inequality,” are “unaware of possibilities of social change,” or are “willing to accept the legitimacy of the established order,” (Sen 1990, p. 127). What Sen (1990) is proposing, is that since an individual cannot have a clear understanding of themselves, and so method to measure

11 However, we can know what is good for us, such as women may be aware that they can do certain things that will be good for them, but what we know is good for us might not socially accepted. This is discussed in more detail by Agarwal (1997) in the following subsection, when Agarwal argues against this notion of women being driven by false perceptions. Instead women may have a clear idea of their interests, but they need to negotiate it with the society's interests.

12 The second issue is to do with the model is being confided to “individual interests” alone, without including the effects of other variables such as contribution. Sen (1990) describes this phenomena as the perceived contribution response, "[if] a person was perceived as making a larger contribution to the overall opulence of the group, then the collusive solution, if different, would be more favorable to that person" (p. 136). Women’s contributions, relative to men, might be undervalued (Agarwal 1997), and this idea is similar to the studies in developed countries, for example England and Killborune (2010), where they study the “cultural devaluation” of household work, where they find women who earn cash, over housewives, have a greater bargaining ability [find a better example] (as cited in Agarwal).
our wellbeing should not then be centered around the individual’s “perceived interests” or preferences. He writes, there is a need to “distinguish between the perception of interest and some more objective notions of their respective wellbeing,” meaning we need a more "objective" way of measuring wellbeing. (p. 133)

For example, if people are undernourished, it does not make sense to wait to assess how an individual feels about their state of wellbeing (let alone that they are even aware of their undernourishment), but instead, undernourishment calls for some standard of measuring how that person is faring, which can be used at once, and has a detached aspect. Therefore Sen (1990) urges us towards using capabilities. A person is undernourished, because they are denied certain capabilities, such as the "ability to be nourished.” (p. 127)

We can imagine aspects to women's empowerment in a similar way. Individuals might not have a clear understanding of themselves, which means that they will not always know what is best for them. Sen (1990) writes that this sort of misunderstanding, when people are driven by these false mental states, reinforces and keeps in place inequitable power structures, such as gender inequality (p. 126). Perceptions can be shaped by what others think of us, our ability, our needs, and our worth. By this reasoning, women are not fully able to perceive their self interests, partly because of how other people, in their family, or community, perceive them, and box them within constructed gender roles. But if women already have a false perception of their self interests, then they come into the bargaining process asking or bargaining for less, which
legitimizes other people's expectations of their needs as being lesser.\textsuperscript{13} Sen (1990), describes this bias in perception, towards favoring other members of the family, as the "perceived interest response,"

"given other things, if the self interest perception of the persons were to attach less value to his or her own well being, then the collusive solution, if different would be less favorable to that person, in terms of well being" (p. 136).

Agarwal (1997) both expands and argues against this notion of a “false consciousness,” (p. 23) highlighting that while women can sometimes settle for less than they would have liked to bargain for, this might not arise from selflessness but a limitedness of their options to chose from, to begin with (p. 24). Sometimes, if women are more dependent on family support, and can derive utility from this children, their concern for the family’s wellbeing over theirs might still be “consistent with self interest” (Seiz 1999, p. 384). Agarwal (1997) suggests that being altruistic can still imply having self awareness. She give’s examples (Sharma 1980, Kishwar 1982, Lindholm 1982), of many instances which challenge the idea of women in South Asia suffering from false perceptions, and accepting the “legitimacy of intra household inequality.” The outward “appearance of compliance,” also does not mean that women are not able to perceive their best interests, but can “reflect a survival strategy stemming from the constraints on their ability” to act “overtly” or bargain openly about for those interests (p. 24).

\textsuperscript{13} If a woman’s role in the household consists solely of cooking and taking care of her children, then “inaccurate perceptions” (Agarwal 1997, p. 11) about her needs undervalue her contributions relative to wage labour of her husband Agarwal (1994) highlights that women’s needs can be conflated with the “family’s needs,” and Sen (1990) and England and Kilbourne (1990), argue that while men may be driven by self interests, and have a much clearer sense of self interests, women may see theirs as being absorbed into the welfare of the households, or are more socialized into becoming more caring, selfless, and are less likely to bargain for their own set of preferences (as cited in Seiz 1999, p. 384). The family can undervalue the needs of a woman. And the outcome of a bargaining process will be less favorable to someone if they attach less value to their own well being relative to others.
Chen (1983), and Kabeer (1997) also give examples of women opting “private forms of empowerment,” which retains a “public image, and honor, of the traditional decision-maker,” but in their private lives, have “backstage influence in decision making.” (as cited in Kabeer 1999, p. 448)

**Social norms**

I started the criticism of the bargaining models with the idea of false perceptions. But it is important to look into why are perceptions false and on what basis are they false. And finally, how do these false perceptions come about? Perceptions come about through social norms and deeply held beliefs. While women’s perceptions can be shaped by norms, norms by itself is shaped by lived realities, which are not fixed, and are therefore changeable (Agarwal 1997).

Kabeer (1999) and Agarwal (1997) argue that perceptions are not false, or incorrect, because the way we form our preferences, what we need or desire, is shaped by the context of our day to day lives, which is the product of our "individual histories," and our material and social realities (Kabeer, p. 441). And essentially, Kabeer (1999) and Agarwal (1997) argue that we cannot call our lived experiences false, because they are lived and therefore real. Kabeer (1999) also highlights that our perceptions and beliefs are shaped by a "deeper level of reality," such as social norms and traditions (p. 441). Agarwal (1997) sees this as "external constraints" that is "acting overtly [against women's] self interests," which can be contested and bargained over, as social norms are endogenous to the bargaining process (p. 25).

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14 At the same time, perceptions of individuals can also shape social norms. Perceptions of others over time, from reiteration and repetition, can take on fixed meanings, and come across as natural and established (Butler 2009). Agarwal (1997) talks of how inadequate perceptions about women's productivity and contribution can get “institutionalized” as a norm, by systematically paying lower wages to women over men. This is one of the ways in which perceptions influence social norms, but it is important to see them as distinct from social norms, as perceptions can affect bargaining ability by itself. (p. 12)
Before I talk in more depth about these "deeper level of realities" that help form women's preferences, I would like to emphasize that while these authors argue against Sen's (1990) placing of importance in women's false or incorrect perceptions, the differences between Sen (1990) and these authors seem mostly to be a difference of language. Sen (1990) also writes that preferences are formed from deeply held beliefs, norms, as well as people’s everyday lived realities. While it is true that our perceptions in a sense cannot be false, because it is based on lived realities, it is also true that maybe this is a lived reality that we want to change. After all, gender empowerment has been central in international development projects. What would we think of development as if it does not provide a space for us to imagine a better future, or lead us to somewhere we ought to be. Of course, someone has to take a normative position about where we ‘ought to be,’ and what is considered a ‘better place,’ which can be problematic. This is one of the main tensions that arise when reading Stern et al. (2005) in the next chapter. The tension, or even a confusion, is over whether Stern et al. (2005) actually feel that preferences must be changed and that the current set of preferences of the people they want to empower are wrong. But addresses this issue, saying that his intention is not to "engineer" an ideal set of preferences for anyone (p. 262). But their intention is to create spaces in which individuals have a chance to reform their preferences, and similarly where norms can also be challenged and changed. Stern et al. (2005) write more specifically,

“Trying to analyze and tackle the problems of policy in the context of changing preferences in this way is not about trying to engineer preferences. Instead, it is about social processes that empower people to actively participate, so that along the way they will transform their own identities, preferences, and beliefs.” (p. 262)
In the case of gender empowerment, Stern et al. (2005) would suggest that women should be in these spaces, making a normative assessment themselves of where they ought to be. I will talk about this in greater detail in next chapter. For the moment, changing social norms or "endogeneity of social norms" is also central to Agarwal's (1997) argument to increasing women's bargaining ability (p. 37).

Kabeer (1999) highlights that preferences can be a product of a "deeper level of reality" which is not visible and apparent "in daily life because it is inscribed in the taken for granted rules, norms and customs within which everyday life is conducted" (p. 411). The way a "deeper level of reality" shapes our preferences, can be understood by Bourdieu's (1977) theory of "doxa" (p. 159). "Doxa" is the attributes of a culture and tradition, that is accepted as natural and is not open to question or contestation (as cited in Kabeer 1999; and Agarwal 1997). We move away from the static state of "doxa," when we have a alternative ways of "being and doing" as "material and cultural possibilities," so what was previously passed off as natural, will start to loose this fixed character, and will "reveal the underlying arbitrariness of the given social order" (Kabeer 1999, p 141).

Another way to understand this is through Butler's (2009) idea of framing. Butler (2009) highlights that certain political events are framed in a particular way, which frames our response to it, while certain things outside of the frame is left unthinkable, such as the lives lost of enemy civilians in war that are not framed as valuable by its opposition side. Therefore we (in the opposition) cannot grieve those lives in the same way. When we come to realize we are desensitized towards those lives, it leads us question what we view as normal or grievable lives, and what leads us to think think that are normal. This realization and the questioning that ensues
challenges the frames that have shaped the world in a particular way for us. So when we see how certain things are framed to pass off as natural, then in this realization, there is also a potential to change how we frame them.

Agarwal (1997) argues that in the bargaining household models, norms are exogenous, but in actuality, norms can be bargained over, and we can create new social realities in this way. She suggests that gender relations should not only be conceptualized in terms of division of labour, or access to resources, but also in how certain "ideas and representations" are ascribed to men and women. (p. 1) Agarwal (1997) argues that norms are not unchangeable, but in fact, they themselves may be "subject to bargaining and change." Certain constructions of women’s roles and behavior in society, are not fixed or “indisputable,” but may have come out of “past ideological struggles” and bargaining processes. To take norms, that have been “taken for granted” into an space for “contestation,” itself requires bargaining. However, it has the potential of gaining, for example, acceptance to inequities that women suffer as not being "biologically rooted," but as "cultural constructions.” (Agarwal 1997, p. 19)

The bargaining outcomes of these new social realities, which represent that social norms have changed, depends on economic factors, the role of collective action, and women's ability to bargain outside of the household, in the community, and in policy making. While the intra-household bargaining models implicitly place women within the households, women's ability to

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15 Agarwal (1997) argues that norms interfere with the household bargaining process both exogenously and endogenously. Social norms, exogenously, can affect the outcomes of the bargaining process, by "setting limits" to what can be bargained for, what sort of behavior is "legitimate," and the restrictions placed on the bargaining can affect a women’s bargaining power in the household. Norms are also manifested in “certain cultural constrains of appropriate female behavior” which in turn affects how the bargaining process in conducted. In these examples, norms affect the bargaining process, and its final outcome, such as the wellbeing of its members, but in a sense, are outside of the household bargaining process, they are exogenous. (p. 15-17)
bargain outside of the household is crucial, because it is at this level that social norms are formed and can be negotiated.¹⁶ (p. 27)

The "recognition" that women are motivated with self interests, as are men, and both can be motivated by altruism and self interests, shifts our attention to the more "material constraints that shape women’s behavior” (Agarwal 1997, p. 27) and “ability to make choices” (Kabeer 1999, p. 436) they value. As for policy making and grassroots interventions, rather than trying to find solutions in raising “women’s awareness of what constitutes their well being,” Agarwal (1997) suggests that more attention should be focused towards “strengthening women’s fall back positions, so they become less economically and socially dependent on sons, husbands, brothers.” (p. 27) Therefore she emphasizes the need to look at ways in which social norms interact endogenously and exogenously with the household, and determine people’s fall back positions. Agarwal moves away from the language of “false conciseness” because they suggested that women do not have clear notion of their self interests. She argues more likely the case that women do have clearly perceived interests, but they are constrained from making choices, in line with their self interests, because of social norms. So by changing social norms, women can reach closer to making decisions along their self interests.

However, it must be noted that Agarwal (1997) is still arguing within the frame work of the intra household bargaining models, where the constraints that determine a woman’s bargaining ability are still in a sense external¹⁷ to her. Constraints can also be imagined, or can

¹⁶ In Agarwal’s (1997) own words, “for ideas and practices to become norms, they require acceptance outside of the household.” In the labour market, we can bargain for “wages.” In the work spaces, women's bargaining power can be shaped not only by "gender gaps in skills and education" but also social perceptions of their "domestic responsibilities" as women. Individuals can also be in a cooperative conflict with the community, like in the household, over sharing common resources such as "water source… positions of political power" or over norms set by the communities that "dictate social [appropriate] behavior." (p. 28-30)

¹⁷ I am alluding to Stern et al.’s (2005) idea of external constraints.
exist in a “discursive” level as Kabeer (1999) highlights (p. 441). Of course, when Agarwal (1997) suggests that social norms about gender roles or what is appropriate behavior for women can be changed, it would also mean that women can imagine new possibilities for themselves. But since Agarwal (1997) concludes with an emphasis on “material constraints,” it is important to make this further clarification. Changing social norms is not only changing a woman’s material surroundings, but it is also working through how she can now imagine herself. Kabeer (1999) suggests that we negotiate with social norms, as we try and move away from a static state of "doxa" to a state of "critical consciousness," when we have an alternative ways of "being and doing" as "material and cultural possibilities." (p. 441) So the choices that women feel that they have, should also exist in a discursive level, as the section below explains. We can change a woman's material conditions, and increase her bargaining strength, but it may not enough, if she still doesn't perceive herself as being able to bargain for a greater share.

**Power, choices, and preferences**

When we introduce the idea of preference formation to the discussion of empowerment, it complicates our understanding of power and the ability to make choices (Kabeer 1999). The problem is no longer that women are disempowered because they are making the wrong choices, choices that are not in line with their preferences. But it is the contrary, they are disempowered because their preferences do not lead them to make the best choices for themselves. As Kabeer (1999) explains,

"the possibility that power operates not only through constrains on people's ability to make choices, but also through their preferences and values and hence the choices that

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18 Discursive choices or alternatives would mean choices and alternatives that can be imagined. Rokheya Hossain.
they make, appears to pose a serious challenge to the basic equation made in this paper between power and choice." (p. 442)

If power also operates through people’s preferences, which is constitutive of their ideas and beliefs, then Kabeer (1999) writes that, we can only "retain" the relationship between “power” and “choices” by “extending the idea of [material] alternatives to encompass discursive alternatives.” (p. 442) Another way to phrase this would be, power is not just having an ability to choose between an alternative set of choices that are “material” (or physically there), but it is also having choices in a “discursive” sense (we can imagine that they are there). If women are implicated in an inequitable power structure, the choices that they make can be a reflection of their individual preferences, but power here cannot derive from their ability to make choices. We need to address their preferences, because those women may be in a state of “doxa,” where they do not question the inequities that blight their lives (p. 441). But to move towards "critical consciousness," when women are aware and critically think about their social order, rather than accepting it, Kabeer highlights that there needs to be an availability of "discursive alternatives" as well as material ones. Similarly, we judge an achievement outcome, such as whether a policy outcome could be taken as having empowered a woman and taken her out of the state of "doxa," not by just by asking whether "other choices were not only materially possible but whether they were conceived to be within the realms of possibility," or in other words, whether those choices could have been imagined as being possible. (p. 442) In another article, Kabeer (2005) writes,

“Alternatives must not only exist, they must also be seen to exist. Power relations are most effective when they are not perceived as such. Gender often operates through unquestioned acceptance of power. Thus women, who for example internalize their lesser claim on household
resources, or accept violence at the hands of their husbands, do so because to behave otherwise is considered outside the realm of possibility. These forms of behavior could be said to reflect ‘choice’, but are really based on denial of choice.” (p. 14)

This idea thinking is in line with the capability approach, where what matters is not necessarily what we chose, the outcome, but also what we could’ve chosen otherwise. If a woman is choosing to stay at home, then we evaluate this outcome based on what other choices she had. These choices are both material and discursive, the latter reflects a women’s ability to imagine that such a choice to be viable in their current reality. This woman may have come from a wealthy household, was educated, and could have sought work. She has that choice to work in a material sense because of the opportunities that her education degree has opened for her. But we should also ask, was she able to confidently see herself in a role other than that of a housewife? Even though she has obtained education, social boundaries can inhibit her from actually feeling like she can make something out of her education.19 I use another example from

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19 Kabeer (2005) talks about the limitations of education as a channel to women’s empowerment, by giving several examples from the developing world. An education degree can be seen as “equipping girls to be better wives… or increasing their chances of getting a suitable husband.” There has been an evident “gender bias” among teachers in parts of rural India, who give “more attention to boys and have lower opinion of girl’s abilities.” Lastly, curriculums have also been found to carry and “mirror… wider social inequities,” where girls are stereotypically presented as “passive, modest, and shy.” This has a powerful effect of “legitimizing” and “reinforcing traditional gender roles.” (p. 17)
the experiences of a successful HIV-AIDs intervention program in a red-light district in India, to illustrate this point further.20

Feminist concepts of empowerment

The idea of discursive alternatives and acquiring the ability to envision between different possibilities for oneself is central to the early feminist concepts of empowerment. Baltiwala (1994) traces the idea of women's empowerment to popular education, where empowerment was essentially a process of learning "about one’s own oppression… [by] first becoming aware of the ideology that legitimizes male domination.” (as cited in Esplen et al. 2006, p. 3) Learning about how one is implicated in an unequal power relation is important in understanding oneself and building one’s consciousness. Building one's sense of consciousness, could also be seen as a way towards moving away from a state of "doxa" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 159) towards a state of "critical consciousness" (Kabeer 1999, p. 441). But the feminist popular education agenda went beyond building self awareness of women, but also towards mobilizing “the poor to struggle actively for change” (Batliwala 1994, p. 128). The goals of feminist popular education were defined in the following way,

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20 For example, Rao and Walton (2004) talk about how a red-light district in Kolkata saw a large improvement in the rates of HIV infection because the policy intervention tried to work with the sex workers, and make them see a different role to themselves and the impact they could have on their peers’ lives as well. Sex-work is socially stigmatized in Indian society, and previous efforts had tried to steer sex-workers away from their work, which in turn, alienated them further from the rest of society. It dehumanized their livelihoods. However, in a new intervention, health workers went in and "began treating sex workers with respect, as individuals who went about the ordinary business of life." After building a long relationship with them, starting with providing just basic health services, they gradually trained sex workers themselves to "pass on information to their co-workers" about HIV prevention. This method proved to be a lot more successful. The authors conclude saying, "this process of educating the sex workers... led, over a period of two or three years, to a metamorphosis in the sex worker's aspirations." It gave them the ability to imagine themselves as doing more than they thought they were capable of doing, including doing work that helped others. The intervention changed their aspirations and started a positive feedback mechanism. Soon these same sex workers "founded a union to fight for legalization... and other rights. Public events, such as festivals... were routinely organized by them, which contributed to the process of mobilization and the removal of stigma." (p. 6-8) The initial health intervention had sought out to do one thing, to reduce instances of HIV infection, but it left them with a bigger capacity to imagine, and this initiated a virtuous cycle.
“demonstrate to women and men how gender is constructed socially… and can be changed… to build a collective and alternative visions for gender relations…to help women to develop skills to assert themselves… to build a network of women and men… to help… pressurize for change” (Walters 1991, as cited in Batliwala 1994, p. 128)\(^2\)

The goal of building women's self awareness was to make them understand how "gender is constructed socially," (p. 128) by social norms, institutions, and our everyday practices, and to then try and show the possibility that "ideas and representations" (Agarwal 1997, p. 1) of gender roles and expectations can be changed. Having discursive alternatives (Kabeer 1999), or in the words of popular education, showing women "alternative visions of gender relations," (Batliwala 1994, p. 128) is a key step towards bringing this realization to women. This also means that empowerment is something that must come from "within" instead of “something that can be done to” them (Cornwall 2016, p. 356).

Cornwall (2016) revisits the feminist literature which gave foundational work on empowerment, and argues that feminist thinkers such as Baltiwal (1993, 1994, 2007), Kabeer (1999), Rowlands (1996, 1997) and Gita Sen (1997), wanted to move away from seeing empowerment as something that can be given to women, but rather as a process which entailed recognizing the inequalities of power, and then building the ability to demand for their rights, and bring structural changes.

\(^2\) In just this definition, there are elements of empowerment that I have reviewed earlier, starting from the idea that our behavior is socially determined, preferences and norms can be changed, women need to be able to have choices that are both material and discursive, and empowerment starts from an individual but it is also something that is driven through a collective effort.
They also went beyond seeing empowerment in terms of material and economic resources. There is also a social and political element. Empowerment is a “conscientization” process which engages people “in making sense of their worlds, their relations, their assumptions and beliefs, practices and values.” The second point is that empowerment is “relational,” and understanding of the “sociality of the concept” is vital. What these two points suggests is that though empowerment must come from within the individual, there needs to be a mobilizing force for political and social action, that is greater than the individual. This broadens the framework for analyzing empowerment, as something much broader than just concerning the individual and “individual self assertion.” It brings out the “relational” aspect of empowerment, which highlights the importance of relationships, and an understanding that the individual is a part of a collective. (p. 344)

There are three foundational definitions of empowerment in particular, that I have used throughout this paper. Baltiwala (1994) envisions power as "control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology." Material assets can be thought of as "physical, human, or financial" resources, ranging from "labour, land, and access to money." Where as intellectual resources can be understood in terms of "knowledge, ideas," and having control over them, means to have the ability to "generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalize specific sets of values, attitudes and behaviors." Empowerment then is a “process” which “challenges patriarchal [or existing] power relations,” with a goal of “gaining control over the sources of power” (p. 129). Rowlands (1996) highlights that the we must envision empowerment as a

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22 Therefore, power comes from the ability to govern not only the distribution of "material" resources, but also from the ability to "influence knowledge and ideology" which shape "social relations" in both the "public" and "private sphere." (Baltiwala, p. 129)
process which will “lead people to believe themselves as able and entitled” to “occupy a decision making space,” in the household, community, or state, and this self awareness will give people who were “affected” a chance to “see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and have influence.” (p. 87, as cited in Cornwall 2016, p. 344) Finally, Kabeer (1999) conceptualizes “power” as the “ability to make choices,” and empowerment is a “process” by which we “acquire” that ability to make choices. (p. 436)

After being introduced several ideas that have been central to our understandings of women's empowerment, we can move on how they are understood in more mainstream development practices today. This will be the focus of the rest of the paper. To begin with, there are points of tensions between how definitions, indicators, and measurements of empowerment are featured in development practices, with the foundational feminists conceptions of empowerment. Kabeer (1999) suggests that there is a gap between how the process of empowerment is envisioned in the advocacy of feminist goals, versus the “instrumental forms of advocacy,” which “combine gender equality and women’s empowerment,” because the former requires policy makers and planners to step out of the “conceptual territory of welfare, poverty and efficiency, and into the nebulous territory of power and social injustice.” In opting for a more instruments form of equality and empowerment, which suggests that it is advocated as a means to a larger set of “multiplier effects,” offering the potential to achieve more “familiar and approved goals,” such as economic growth, it has required both quantification and attempt to measure empowerment. However, scholars question the extent to which empowerment can be “clearly defined, [and] let a lone measured,” therefore Kabeer (1999) sets out to study what the
implications are of “attempting to measure what is not easily measurable” and trying to translate “intrinsic arguments for feminist goals” with “instrumentalist” ones. (p. 436)

Kabeer (1999) first offers a critical perspective of defining and measuring the resource aspect of empowerment. In the development literature, she writes that there is a “widespread tendency” to talk about “access of resources,” which suggests that a changes in the women’s access to resources translates "automatically" to changes in the choices they are able to make. However, access to resources do not translate to "actual" choices, but rather, “potential” choices, and uses the association of land rights to women's empowerment to explain this. There is usually a “casual” connection made between “patrilineal principles of descent and inheritance,” which privileges males in terms of access to land, and as a result, low levels of “female autonomy.” However, as is often generalized in the case of South Asia, rules about land rights is not “uniform,” and varies among Hindus and Muslims. Muslim men and women can inherit property, although men tend to inherit twice as more, and even if they can inherit land, it is customary and expected by women to “waive their land rights to their brothers.” While the waiving of land rights, is seen as a foregone access to an important economic resource and ability to make a choice. (p. 443) If we see this in phenomena terms of potential choices, then by waiving their land rights now, they are able “to strengthen their future claim on their brothers, should their marriage break down.” In a way, this waiving of rights becomes “a resource to bargain with” in the future. If the resources and income one has if a marriage were breaks down

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23 Resources are thought of as there to begin with, they are the “pre-conditions” in the process of empowerment. Acquiring these resources “enhances” our ability to make choices. They are acquired through our “social relationships,” that is, we are tied to one another, as bargaining agents in a family, or economic agents in the market, or as members participating in a community, and our positions in these domains determine our access to resources. But resources can also be thought of as something we can claim in the "future," not just something we have now. (Kabeer 1999, p. 445)
what determines one’s threat point and bargaining strengths, this has indirectly raised their bargaining ability. The waiving of land rights has by sisters, has in turn given them “a material basis to a moral entitlement,” almost acting as a guarantee issued in the name of the women to make claims in the future. (p. 444)

Kabeer (1999) describes agency as an “ability to define one’s goals and act upon them,” and this makes up the second aspect of empowerment. The problems with defining and measuring agency is that not all types of agency have the "same consequential significance" for women's lives, so the presence of some type of decision making ability, is not always evident of empowerment. (p. 446) When we view agency within the framework of the bargaining or decision making in economic analysis, we need to be aware that there are some types agencies which will be given to women, for example, making decisions on cooking food, because women are expected to make those decisions. The way we measure agency, or its existence, is usually based on responses to questionnaires that ask women about the roles that they play when the household has to make different types of decisions. Kabeer gives a literature review of many of these studies, and then suggests that there is clearly a “hierarchy of decisions” that a household has to make, and studies can show that women play a role in making decisions that were "assigned to women anyway by preexisting gender roles and responsibilities," but they tell little about their ability to make "strategic life choices" or choices that the women were not able to

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24 Agency enters the social science literature in the form of “bargaining and negotiation… decision making” (Kabeer 1999, p. 438). Amartya Sen, in his cooperative conflict model (an expansion of the intra-household bargaining models) sees people’s decision making ability as agency. Sen (1999) writes in the chapter “Women’s Agency and Social Change,” that the movement towards a bargaining model, from analyzing the household as a unitary agent, is also parallel to a shift in the objective of women’s movements, from demanding wellbeing to demanding agency, where women are no longer passive agents in an altruistic household, but active agents who are part of a cooperative conflict with other members. In his analysis, a woman’s ability to earn an independent income, be employed outside of the home, have ownership rights, (p. 191) are some of the resources that enhances her ability to “define their own life choices and pursue their own goals” (Kabeer 1999, p. 438).
make in the “past.” (p. 447) However, studies can also underestimate the decision making ability of women. The “statistical perspectives on decision making,” or the survey modality by which we measure agency, is often a “simple window on complex realities,” which do not reveal the “subtle negotiations that go on between women and men in their private lives,” such as the “private forms of empowerment,” mentioned earlier, that women have taken up, which gives them a “backstage influence in decision making processes.” (p. 448) The way we measure this very concept can actually undermine the agency of some women.

Finally, identify whether an achievement outcome can be a "valid measure," or evidence of women's empowerment, Kabeer (1999) suggests that we need to consider "whose agency" was involved in the process, and if this outcome "transformed prevailing inequities in resources and agency" rather than reinforcing them or leaving them unaffected (p. 452) Kabeer gives an example of this identification challenge, with a study (Kishor 1997) that measures the effects of women's empowerment on two achievement outcomes, infant survival rates and infant immunization. Kishor (1997) identifies “direct” and “indirect” (“source” and “setting”) indicators of women's empowerment, and measures their effects on the two achievement outcomes. They study finds that the “indirect source/setting” indicators of women’s empowerment have a greater effect on children’s health. (as cited in Kabeer 1999, p. 449)

25 Resources and agency come together to constitute as “capabilities” (Sen 1990, 1997, 1999), which is the “potential” people can have for living the lives that the value. Capabilities are not an end in itself, but instead play an instrumental role to achieve certain, preferred ends, ways of “being and doing” that Sen refers to as “functioning.” There are many ways of “being and doing,” and these outcomes, or “achievements” make up the third dimension of choice, and subsequently empowerment. Empowerment becomes both a process, as highlighted by resources and agency dimensions, as well as an end result, reflective of a new social and economic outcome, as achievements. (Kabeer 1999, p. 438)

26 Examples of direct measures of empowerment are devaluation of women, women’s emancipation, equality in marriage, financial autonomy. Examples of indirect (source) measures are participation in the modern sector, lifetime exposure to employment, and indirect (setting) measures are family structure, marital advantage. (Kishor 1997, as cited in Kabeer 1999)
Although the “direct” measures might not have fully captured women’s empowerment, an alternate explanation that Kabeer (1999) provides is that women already have a “pre-assigned sphere of jurisdiction” over the care and upbringing of children. This means making any “improvement” in this sphere, which capture’s women’s “ability to take effective action … to the welfare of their children,” should be seen rather as improvement in “efficacy” as caretakers rather than being reflective empowerment. (p. 450) Children’s wellbeing do depend on women’s agency, but not as “wives,” which the “direct” measures of empowerment would have considered, but rather as “mothers.” While both the achievements in the study are “highly held values from a variety of perspectives,” and the outcome depended greatly on the effectiveness of women as “agents,” the achievements did not “by itself necessarily imply a shift in underlying power structures,” since women were effective agents only “within prescribed gender roles” as mothers. (p. 451)

**Implications of feminist insights on our understanding of gender empowerment**

From the literature review above, it is starting to become clear that empowerment should be seen beyond the dimension of resources, and should incorporate agency measures (Kabeer 1999). We need to address an individual's preferences and that it can potentially change to be more in line with their own self interests, goals and aspirations. Since preferences are socially constructed (Sen 1990, Agarwal 1997), there needs to be a recognition that individuals are social beings and so interventions should be aimed not only at the individual, but also at the community level.

The end goal of empowerment is individual agency as well as access and control of resources. Control over resources can be both material in terms of economic resources, as well as
intellectual, where the latter can be thought of as determining an individual's ability to shape ideas and knowledge (Baltiwala 1994, p. 129). Agency is referring to people's ability to define and act on their aspirations and goals, to have the freedom to choose between alternative set of realities or the potential ways of being and doing (Kabeer 1999). People, however, may have false or incorrect perceptions about their preferences, ie. preferences may not always be reflective of the individual (Sen 1990). For example, in patriarchal societies, it is not that women are simply making the wrong choices, because they’re constrained by repressive social norms, but norms interact with individual’s own perceptions of themselves. So women become coopted into the system by internalizing patriarchal norms, and are willing to settle for less, conflate their self interests with the self interests of others in the family. (Sen 1990, Agarwal 1997)

If the problem is with self perceptions, then we should intervene at the level of the individual. However, if perceptions are socially constructed, as in perceptions are a reflection of our day to day lives and social norms, then we need to move beyond the notion of false perceptions. The language of falseness and incorrectness might undermine the agency of some women who may “overtly" seem to be accepting the inequities in their lives, but "subvertly" employ strategies that enable them to have a say and an influence in the bargaining process (Agarwal 1997, p. 25). Perceptions are formed by our lived experience, or can be a reflection of a "deeper level of reality" that is not always visible but historically and socially conditions our behavior (Kabeer 1999, p. 441). Instead of saying that women have false perceptions, we can come to see women as being in a state of “doxa.” The idea of "doxa" posits the possibility that there are alternative realities to the one that women (in the state of "doxa") are living in. (Bourdieu 1977, Agarwal 1997, Kabeer 1999) These alternative realities or different ways of
being and doing are constrained by social norms, which Agarwal (1997) argues is changeable and not fixed. If the constraining norms are patriarchal norms, then what we are trying to do by bargaining and contesting with these norms, is that we are trying to expand the choice set that is available to a woman, so a woman is left with more opportunities (ways of doing and being) that is socially acceptable and sanctioned. This is why interventions should be at the level of the community because norms and beliefs are formed and regulated at this level, outside of the individual and the household.

Stern et al. (2005) makes this argument in my final chapter, where he argues that an individual's empowerment is partly constrained by their external environment and so empowerment is partly achieved by "relaxing" or removing these constraints (p. 226).27

Sen (2008) and Campbell (2003) give examples of how in the bio-medical discourse, HIV-AIDs is treated as an individual phenomena, and so the interventions are very individualistic. But it largely ignores the impact that the society can have on the individual’s chances of contracting it, as well as on their experience of living with the disease.28

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27 In the next chapter, Stern et al. (2005) gives examples of the ways people's external environment can act as a constraint to their empowerment, he writes that an "individual exists in a family, economic, social, cultural, and political contexts that plays a powerful role in the ability to shape one's lives and may impose strong "external constraints" (p. 102). He gives an example from Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, an organization that works with mostly poor women of lower caste, to offer them services ranging from legal support and offering credit, to providing training and child care. Since lower caste women face social constraints because of both their caste and gender, SEWA has helped them demand for better working conditions and treatment, as well as put their children to school. They have found observable differences in the "confidence and self esteem" of these women, and in their communities too, seeing lower caste women participate more have also "raised their status" among other villages. (p. 206)

28 The experience with how HIV-AIDs has failed to be a community driven intervention can explain this idea further. Sen (2008) and Campbell (2003) explain how biomedical discourses explains that the HIV virus is contracted by an individual, most of the time through a voluntary act, such as sexual intercourse, and sometimes it happens through involuntary acts, such as by birth or blood transfusions. Therefore, campaigns are led to prevent an individual from contracting it. This discourse however, does not actually account for the spaces that the individuals occupy, in their village, community, and society at large. These individuals are implicated in greater power relations, than just one involving humans against a deadly virus, such as of gender, race and sex. Communities either restrain or enable people from taking control over their lives. Finally, in the biomedical discourse, the HIV virus is impartial to whom it infects, other than the individual bodies that are most susceptible. But the infectious agent “takes advantage of every human fault and failing, every denial of basic human rights.” (Campbell 2003, p. 12).
However, is disempowerment simply not having an ability to choose? If we exogenously give choices to women, is that considered empowerment? Is giving women a choice to exercise their preferences enough? Kabeer (1999) had pointed out that when we measure any achievement outcomes, we need to consider “whose agency” was used in the formation of this outcomes (p. 452). If empowerment means also the ability to have and exercise one's agency, then surely disempowerment must also include not having a role or a space to contribute to the negotiation and formation of norms (Rowlands 1996). Empowerment comes from being able to define one’s own preferences (and aspirations and goals), so women should have a constructive role in what those choices are. If we think of expanding choices in terms of an exogenous intervention, then it contradicts the end goal of individual agency. Empowerment therefore needs to be rethought as a political and social engagement, where women themselves play a role in creating these set of options.

In the following chapter, I also talk about women's own political empowerment, which is closer to this aspect of empowerment. In this case, women are not only preventing society from constraining their own formation of preferences, but women are also contributing to the way social norms change. In another instance, Banerjee and Duflo (2011) give an example from an experience of a family planning campaign in rural Bangladesh, where simply giving women more ways to manage their fertility, by supplying more contraceptives and having health workers run awareness campaigns was not enough to convince women to adopt modern contraceptive
practices. The program had to instead rely on some of the women in those communities itself, who then created new possibilities in managing fertility for other women.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{29} More specifically, in this family planning campaign in rural Bangladesh, health workers from women’s own communities were trained and asked to visit households where women were “in purdah and therefore limited in their mobility, bringing the discussion of contraception to places where it used to be taboo.” By talking to women, who they knew and could identify with, slowly they were able to realize a new possibility in their lives as mothers, and seeing one of ‘them’ use contraceptives, made it easier to adjust to this new social reality. (Banerjee and Duflo 2011)
Chapter 3: Development, changing preferences, and the RCT political participation literature

Development and empowerment

"In its emphasis on family, community, social, and governance constraints, the concept of empowerment goes well beyond levels of investment in human capital and physical assets. Empowerment centers on people's ability to act and make effective decisions on key aspects of their lives. It can also include individuals perception of her or his role and expectations in life. Thus an individual's preferences and approach to behavior make up part of the story of empowerment" (Stern 2005, p. 184)

The idea of individual agency suggests that if individuals should be able to define their goals, act on them, and be free to choose the types of lives they value, then in order to make this happen, they need to address and be able to change their self perception and beliefs, so it is more in line with their goals and aspirations. Preferences should be changeable and endogenous. This is a shift in thought from neoclassical economics which, even in its models of intra household bargaining, still maintains the notion of fixed preferences.

In Stern et al. (2005), we find that the rhetoric has clearly changed, as they stress that empowerment is partly achieved by laying out a platform where individuals are able to freely form their preferences (p. 262). One of the authors, Nicholas Stern, was the ex-chief economist of the World Bank and we can see this as an attempt to bring in ideas from outside, such as the field of behavioral economics, feminist economics, and cultural anthropology, into mainstream
economics literature. For example, the *World Development Report 2003* from the World Bank (2002), puts emphasis on “sustainable” development, by moving away from focusing on policy outcomes to “processes” for decision making\(^{30}\), which has the idea of "preference change at its core" (as cited in Stern 2005, p. 258).

Stern et al. (2005) takes development to mean ultimately the empowerment of individuals,\(^{31}\) this is the "main goal of development." Their understanding of empowerment follows closely to the capabilities approach and is defined as the “ability [of an individual] to shape” his or her life.\(^{32}\) (p. 84) They build on Sen’s (1999) placing of importance on capabilities over outcomes or functioning, by suggesting that "enhancing the [the poor's] capabilities to improve their lives - is an end itself, regardless of how it affects economic growth” (p. 85).\(^{33}\)

Lastly, an empowered individual should "themselves be agents," and that "they have choices and be involved in the creation of wealth." Seeing individuals as agents, who define their own terms of the types of lives they want to lead and contributes to decision making, is in line with the idea of individual agency.\(^{34}\) Seeing individuals as agents, is also consistent with the idea that empowerment cannot be given to individuals (Cornwall 2016).

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\(^{30}\) One of these could be the reservation policy in India that I talk about at the end of this chapter, which mandates women to lead in public decision making spaces, such as village councils.

\(^{31}\) Though Stern et al. (2005) is widely talking about empowerment of individuals, and not women, They still place a strong emphasis on women, as a group of individuals, that empowerment is concerned with.

\(^{32}\) Or in other words, "the freedom one has to live the type of life that one choses” (Stern et al. 2005, p. 103)

\(^{33}\) So while education can increase job opportunities, raise incomes, and lead to economic growth, becoming a "means of achieving development... it is also an end in itself, because being educated is a capability." (Stern 2005, p. 85)

\(^{34}\) For Stern et al. (2005), there are three elements towards empowering individuals. The first is to develop their human capital and access to physical assets. The second is to relax external constraints, which are obstacles imposed by family, community, society, and culture that they are situated in. And finally, the third element is to ease internal constraints, which they "impose on themselves." (p. 142) Internal constraints also include "perceived role in family or society, and the capacity to aspire" (p. 243). Therefore I will use women and individuals interchangeably in my writings on Stern et al. (2005).
Development is closely tied with empowerment in the RCT literature as well. Duflo (2012) provides a literature review which summarizes the state of knowledge in the mainstream literature on empowerment. One of the branches of this literature is on women's political empowerment or political participation (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Beaman et al. 2009; Beaman et al. 2012), which I will analyze in greater detail in the final section of this chapter. Duflo (2012) broadly defines women's empowerment in resource and agency dimensions, as having access to better education and health, having labour market opportunities, acquiring legal rights, greater political participation, and more decision making ability (p. 1051-1052). But these variables are also constitutive of development itself, therefore empowerment is closely related to development, as it is seen as "improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development" (p. 1053) Lastly, while development can drive down inequalities that women face and empower them, it is not enough to fully bring about empowerment, as discrimination can still persist. Targeting women's empowerment itself is a "desired goal in itself" because empowering is intrinsically valuable, and empowering women first also "accelerates development," and this is instrumentally valuable (p. 1064).

Relaxing external constraints

Stern et al. (2005) suggest that external obstacles placed on women which prevent them from taking full "advantage of economic opportunities" and "participating" fully in the development process. These obstacles can be a form of discriminatory practices, based on gender, but also race, ethnicity, caste, and religion. (p. 226)

In thinking about empowerment as being partly shaped by people's external constraints, the themes of "participation" and "inclusion" emerge (p. 103). At the core of the idea of
inclusion, is people's social relationships and the way that an individual is being implicated in many forms of power relations, such as gender, race, or class. “Exclusion” is then the constraints placed on the individual's participation from some activities or groups. As Stern et al. (2005) write, "empowerment and inclusion depends on the functioning of social network and on individual's location in them." And so an individual's empowerment is related to their "social capital," which is the "abilities that social networks confer" to an individual, or a group of individuals, such as women. In other words, social capital is the extent to which social networks enable or disable an individual or a group to shape their lives. (p. 143)

Social exclusion is also different from poverty, and for Stern et al. (2005), this is an important distinction because empowerment as a process is often related to poverty alleviation. A person’s material wellbeing, or any other measures we may use to measure poverty, has “no relevance to social exclusion.” This distinction posits the possibility that even women from even higher income households can still be socially excluded from participating in some important activities, such as decision making activities. One of the advantages of focusing on exclusion over poverty, is that it gives a greater emphasis on gender issues, and brings other intersectionalities forward, along the lines of race and class. For example, the idea of social exclusion differentiates the experiences of women from different castes. Certain forms of institutional discrimination can exclude women and minorities from acquiring certain jobs or receiving benefits such as education, while privileging men, or men and women from higher

35 Dufo (2012) suggests that development can ease structural constraints placed on households, by changing exogenous circumstances facing a resource constrained household and giving households more choices, can inadvertently help women. Increasing the household's ability to "weather crisis," by "relaxing the constraints" that resource poor households face, can inadvertently help the women and girls in it, because in times of scarcity and vulnerability, "tragic choices are resolved at the expense of women." (p. 1055)
castes. While women can be a part of a group, but they might have limited power to influence
decisions, if there is a case of elite capture, where they are among women from higher castes, or
other village leaders that are men. Therefore, empowerment should be “seen as effective participation,” because women may participate in something, in the sense of “being present,” but they are not effectively participating, if they are “unheard or ignored.” (p. 104-105)

Participation of women, and other minorities, in the public sphere, or decision making
spaces, is important, because it is one of the ways in which women and minorities can "develop the capacity to aspire to something different.” (p. 229) 36 Appadurai (2004) suggests that for the poor and the marginalized, developing a capacity to aspire, is to do with having a "voice," which means that they must be able to "debate, contest and critique" and essentially, be able to think critically of themselves and the way they are positioned in inequities (social, political, cultural), that prevent them from reaping economic opportunities. Therefore, public action needs to not only ensure rights to poor people, but it needs to foster "voice and representation to poor people in public decision making." (as cited in Stern 2005, p. 229) Effective participation is an important avenue towards empowerment, and this will be discussed in detail, in the RCT studies on women's political participation.

Internal constraints: endogenous and changing preferences

The bargaining household models took preferences to be fixed, and were concerned with the constraints facing a household. In some of the models, women's bargaining strength inside of the household dependent on external factors outside of the household. Duflo (2012) writes that women's lack of opportunities in the labour market can explain for their "unequal treatment" in

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36 The capacity to aspire as something different, has changing preferences and perceptions of one self at the heart of it, and will be discussed later in this chapter.
the household. For example, if women do not work outside of their homes, their needs are undervalued relative to men, because their contribution from household work is undervalued relative to waged employment. Parents might also not invest in their education and health as much, if they perceive their daughters to be married at a young age and go take care of their husband’s households, rather than seeking employment outside. So increasing their labour market opportunities for women, will make investments in their health and schooling more worthwhile. The idea is that increasing opportunities outside, by adding more choices for women, without directly empowering them from within, can still change incentives of parents and lead towards desired outcomes for women. (p. 1057) Duflo (2012) suggests that "a quiet revolution is happening, even if households are not fully aware of consequences of their individual choice" (p. 1058).

Stern et al. (2005) argues against this notion, suggesting instead that parents might be more compelled to send their daughters to school because of a change in their preferences (p. 247). Preference change provides us with a new way of thinking about economic behavior. Preferences has been the topic of concern for feminist economists (as such Sen 1990), political economists, as well as "anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists," but is usually outside the scope of conventional economics (p. 243). The idea of “endogenous preferences” contradict the assumption made in neoclassical economics that individuals have stable preferences (p. 244).

Development becomes not only about changing people's social and economic conditions (p. 243). But if we take development to mean the empowerment of individuals, their ability to shape their lives, then we need to also bring in their preferences for the types of lives that they
wish to live. So development happens to an individual, or individuals are empowered, also
through a change in their preferences. Individuals are empowered when they are able to make
choices that are strategic and valuable for them. But a that choice, what "people do- their
behavior- depends on their preferences.... [and] also on their circumstances and constrains” (p.
244). While circumstances and constraints shape an individual's social and economic conditions,
preferences is concerned with the individual's internal constraints.37

Stern et al. (2005) suggests that there is a “casual relationship between economic
conditions and preferences,” (p. 246) but the direction of causality flow both ways. A change in
economic conditions, when there is a new shift in the economic equilibrium, can lead to a change
in people's preferences, and at the same time a change in preferences, can lead to a shift in the
economic equilibrium.

In Duflo (2012), we encounter women who refuse to rent their land out to their husbands,
even though they know they are foregoing more productivity by not doing so, because women
are faced with more insecure rights to their land than their male counterparts. They are putting
their entitlements to their land away at risk, if they give it over to men to farm it. If those same
women now receive legal and equal access to land as men, they can probably start thinking about
“more possibilities over a much longer term than they had preciously envisaged.” This would
lead to a change in their “time preferences,” since they have secure rights to their land, they can
now rent out their land, and make an investment, that will give them greater returns over a longer
time. (p. 1069)

37 Preferences form through our “personal histories of social and economic experiences, and interactions.” Our
families, community and schooling, are the spaces where preferences are formed.(Stern 2005, p. 243)
But if there is a change in preferences, then this “affects economic outcomes through the choices that individuals and households make,” so preferences can change, even without a change in economic conditions, as the examples below will show. (Stern et al. 2005, p. 246)

The education enrollment rate for girls has changed positively in low and moderately low income countries. Dulfo (2012) writes that in 2010, the enrollment rate for girls and boys in secondary schools was 34 percent and 41 percent respectively, compared to 22 percent and 30 percent respectively twenty years ago (p. 1051). If we think of this phenomena in terms of conventional economic thinking, it would lead us to assume that opportunities in the labour market for girls have been expanding, and there is better information for parents about expected returns to education. All of this builds parents incentives to educate girls, they consider this investment worth while. This is the explanation we receive from Duflo (2012). However, this does not answer, for example, why opportunities changed in the first place? After all, are opportunities not new set of choices, and are choices not a product of our preferences? “Non economists,” therefore, would present a different explanation. They would argue that girls were not sent to schools, because of certain repressive ideas about what a women’s role in society should be, that held girls at home and doing domestic work. These represented their preferences, and were usually “culturally determined,” which can change even in the “absences of changing economic conditions.” (Stern et al. 2005, p. 247)

State led policies can also target preference change, and bring about new economic outcomes, without changing economic conditions. Das Gupta (2004) talks about the “subtle ways

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38 Stern et al. (2005) suggests that preferences change with “shifting economic conditions and experiences” (examples) as well as “sociocultural transition,” such as “social movements… [or] changes in power and ideology of leaders, which might be reflected in changes in education programs… [or] exposure to new ideas” (p. 246).
in which states influence the manifestations of cultural beliefs and values” and lead to changes in preferences over women’s roles (p. 258, as cited in Stern 2005, p. 248). Building on this idea, Stern et al. (2005) suggests that by this reasoning, when a government or NGO tries to incentivize parents to send their daughters to school, they do so not just by talking about the opportunities that education can give their daughters, or talking about the economic and social returns of education, but they would also try to “persuade the parents- often particularly the father- to think differently about the kind of life they want their daughters to lead.” (p. 248)

In the above example, it is not important to distinguish between the effects of changes in information, versus the effect of changes in perceptions, in determining parents' decisions to send their daughters to school, "in some cases [such as this] the distinction will not matter much for policy.” We might be better off using information on the job opportunities, as well as convincing parents to change their views about what roles their daughters should play in society. (p. 252)

However, in the case of convincing women to take up contraceptives, it is vital that policy is aimed at changing preferences of women. This particular example puts to light that it is not enough for there to be an economic change, as in the availability of contraceptives and better access to family planning clinics, might represent a shift in the economic equilibrium, but there must be a shift in the social equilibrium, for women to actually take up contraceptives. Munshi and Myaux (2003), and Schultz and Joshi (2007) talk about similar experiences from family planning campaigns in rural Bangladesh, where female health workers from their own local communities were trained and asked to visit homes where culturally women traditionally lived in isolation from other men besides their own family. Therefore women did not frequently interact with others outside and mostly spent time in the confinement of their homes. But these
campaigns made the health workers visit the women in their homes and essentially in spaces where sex is never openly talked about. By talking to women, who they knew and could identify with, slowly they were able to realize a new possibility in their lives as mothers, and seeing one of ‘them’ use contraceptives, made it easier to adjust to this new social reality. (as cited in Stern et al. 2005; and Banarjee and Duflo 2011).

What does changing preferences mean for development and policies?

Stern et al.’s (2005) argument about internal constraints attacks the core of standard economics theory, where preferences are fixed and policy decisions are made by aggregating individual preferences, and essentially trying to give people what they want (what is in line to their preferences). The underlying assumption is the same as in utility theory where individual will fare better if they are able to consume "a bundle of goods and services ranked higher in the given preference ordered." This is how welfare is measured, by looking at whether an outcome is ranked higher in an individual's preference ordering. An alternative way to assess welfare of a policy measure, is to see whether policy expands freedoms of individuals, and especially the "freedoms for many people." This represents a step in policy towards trying to expand the individual agency of people, which is central to their empowerment. (p. 244)

There are several important questions that is raised by Stern et al. (2005) after addressing changing preferences, listed in their respective order,

"(a) If preference change is an important part of the development story, how does it affect the way we assess different situations or development approaches?... (b) If we are

39 Sen (1990) had tried to distinguish between a person's "wellbeing and agency" saying that "a person ay have various goals and objectives other than the pursuit of his or her well-being" and it is the "agency aspect that is most influenced by a person's sense of obligations and perception of legitimate behavior." What this implies is that focusing on individual agency, rather than individual wellbeing, can also bring in the analysis of how social constraints interact with individual behavior, by influencing their self perceptions of their interests.
accessing wellbeing of a women, do we use the preferences she has now, or the preferences she will have in the future?... (c) If preferences are taken as changeable, what is the foundation for our policy advice?... (and d) Should development agencies be in the business of trying to change preferences?" (Stern et al. 2005, p. 252-262)

Starting with the first two questions, if we accept that development of an individual or a group, may initiate change in their preferences, then it will be hard to access how they are doing (their wellbeing), through a neoclassical utility based approach, where preferences are fixed. This leads to the second question. If our goal is to empower a woman, and if we are to use a neoclassical framework of welfare analysis, we can assess how she is faring in terms of the preferences she has now, and how close she is to having it actualized or satisfied. But the process of empowerment can also initiate a change in her preferences, so an empowered woman will not only be moving closer to her preferences, but she would have moved to a new set of preferences. (p. 252)

There are two ways of dealing with this issue of changing preferences and welfare assessment, one within the neoclassical framework (Becker 1996), and the other in terms of capabilities (Sen 1999). (as cited in Stern, p. 254) The way we understand individual welfare can guide us into designing and accessing policies. In the neoclassical framework, we access individual welfare through the construction of individual preferences and utility. We then proceed to measure what is good for people by seeing how close we are to satisfying their

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40 We are not even in the territory where we can question if there might be something wrong with her preferences now. As mentioned in my second chapter, the neoclassical framework broadly overlooks this possibility.
preferences. One of the ways we can measure the wellbeing of an individual and still hold the logic that their preferences or tastes would change, is by creating a "meta [or] extended-utility function" (Becker 1996, as cited in Stern 2005, p. 254).

Becker (1996) argues that the assumption of fixed preferences should be modified and the idea that tastes can develop into the future should be brought in. Swann (1999) explains that in Becker's (1996) extended utility function, a person's utility over a good, is conditional on two stocks of capital that is held by the individual- personal and social capital. Personal capital explains how an individual's tastes are influenced by their past behavior, and expected future behavior. People form habits, and tastes (or preferences) remains fixed for some goods over a period of time through habit formation. For example, if people are unemployed, they may become risk averse and their choices reflect their preferences for less risk taking. People also have experiences in their youth, which might shape their tastes for particular things for a life time. Social capital, measures the influence of others on an individual's utility function, and it comes from the idea that "men and women want respect, recognition, prestige, acceptance and power from their family, friends, peers and others" and so they make certain choices, such as devoting resources towards taking care of elders, "with an eye to pleasing peers and others in their network" (Becker 1996, p. 12), and building their social capital. Any changes in a

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41 Welfare or wellbeing, is a normative position, reflecting the things that intrinsically good for human beings. But how do we find out "what is good" for a person, or what gives them utility? The prevailing view in welfare economics tries to answer this, by suggesting that welfare can be measured by the satisfaction of preferences. By this we mean, someone is better off if what "[they] prefer comes to pass," not that this will make them "feel satisfied." Individuals are driven by self interests, have perfect information, and have a fixed preference ordering. So by this logic, people should be "good judges" of what they want and need, and "prefer what is good for them." Now that satisfying preferences, constitutes welfare, policy makers can make "people better off by molding their wants," or aggregating their individual preferences. This view largely ignores the fact that preferences may be based on "mistaken beliefs... people may sacrifice their own wellbeing... preferences may reflecting past manipulation or distorting psychological influences." (as cited in Hausman 2013) This is a concern picked up by many feminist economists, such as Sen (1990), and in the current literature, by Stern et al. (2005).

42 Becker uses taste to mean preferences.
preference for a good, can therefore be attributed to changes in the personal or social capital functions. (as cited in Swann 1999, p. 289). This also means that a person's current preference ordering, has tried to incorporate "all possibilities now and in the future." In summary, Becker's (1996) utility function tries to account for all of the changes in preferences that can occur to a person.

According to Stern et al. (2005), this is a very unrealistic approach, to argue that a person is "aware of how experience, argument, and interaction could shape her or his preferences over time." (p. 254) Especially in development countries, where the future is mostly unpredictable, because of the political, economic and social instabilities facing people. The other limitation to this idea is that it is not easy to "identify [as well as quantify] the social and personal capital variables" because they deal with "personal experience, past consumption, culture, and social history." (p. 255)

Policy making can be both driven by the idea of individual preferences to determine welfare, or without preferences, and instead through the idea of freedom and opportunity.

measure what is good for a group of people, by aggregating the welfare of individuals.43 The way we make choices for a society, is therefore, based on the same principles that guide individual choices.44 There are two lines of thought, one preceding the other, that inform the social choice literature. The earlier public choice framework, is concerned with hashing out fixed

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43 Social choice theory deals with how societies, and not individuals make choices. Harsanyi (1955, 1977a) suggests that if "individual preferences and social evaluations both satisfy the axioms of expected utility theory" then we can determine social evaluations by the "weighted sum of individual utilities," or in other words, by assigning weights and then summing individual utilities. Expected utility theory concerns how we can chose rationally when we are uncertain about about outcomes of our decisions. (as cited in Briggs 2017)

44 Social theory, is concerned with how decisions are made collectively, it is the “study of systems and institutions for making collective choices, choices that affect a group of people” (Kelly 1988, as cited in Peter 2005, p. 16), and it is traditionally “preoccupied with solving the problem of aggregating individual preferences” (Alderman 1995)
preferences of individuals, and aggregating it into policy choices. This was once a prevailing assumption in welfare economics, of a “benevolent dictator” that was “in charge of implementing socially desirable policies.” (Peter 2005, p. 16) One can also draw a parallel with Becker’s (1976, 1981) new home economics, which models the entire household's welfare function as a part of the individual's welfare function, who is altruistic head of the household. As in, an altruistic head of the household, makes a collective decision for the wellbeing of all of its members.

However, Arrow (1963) pointed out that a benevolent dictator cannot “gain legitimacy” in a democratic environment, unless there was a way where collective decision was made by “aggregating individual preferences about policy alternatives into a social preference ordering” (as cited in Peter 2005, p. 17). Therefore, the subsequent model of social choice, used the assumption that individuals come with fixed preferences in an electoral system and vote for a preferred outcome. People elect those that match their preferences. In the following section, I will talk about a RCT study which measures the effects of women's political participation on the provisioning of public goods (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004), and argue that the assumptions made in this study reflects the social choice theory of Arrow (1963), where increasing political power of women leads to outcomes that better reflect their fixed preferences. If ten women want a specific policy preference, they may not talk to each other, but they can elect, and vote, leading to outcomes reflective of their fixed preferences. In the Indian state of Bihar, alcoholism among rural men is a common and accepted behavior. During an election campaign for the state minister, a group of women demanded one of the candidates to ban alcohol, and his reply, "if you vote for me, I will ban it," took over headlines across the country soon after. Once he won the
seat, he was compelled at any costs to bring about the ban, and women have taken it among themselves to regulate and enforce it in their homes and communities. (Anand 2017)

However, Stern et al. (2005) highlight that there is a problem with using preferences of an individual to guide social decision making. It turns into a paternalistic view of social decision making, where "we adopt a position that we favor one of the individual's possible preferences set over another in social decision making." (p. 257)

In the context of women's empowerment in development world, another issue arises over who is taking this normative stance. Stern et al. (2005) give an example of compulsory education policies as being paternalistic. But a deeper problem with paternalizing education, in the context of women's empowerment, can be attributed to Nussbaum’s (2000, 2003) claim that literacy is not just a capability, but a “universal human right” that is “needed [for people] to engage with political and social institutions" and to "fully think... one must be literate in ways appropriate to those institutions" (Charusheela 2008, p. 6). In this post-colonial critique of Nusbaum (2000, 2003), Charusheela (2008) highlights that by making such a claim, we “naturalize a higher value accorded to literate people,” and as a result “legitimize the power structure that we are trying to undo,” between the literate and the illiterate, the developed and under-developed peoples (p. 9). Charusheela (2008) gives examples of the many ways illiterate women have gained different forms of empowerment, including political empowerment. But this dichotomy of literate and the illiterate, undermines the agencies of those illiterate women.

Therefore, there can be a crucial tension between empowerment and paternalistic policies. But if preference change is at the base of policy making (Stern et al. 2005), isn't taking a normative stand on which preference needs to be changed also paternalistic, and will lead us to
the same issues highlighted by Charusheela (2008)? A crucial tension that comes up in Stern et al. (2005) is whether "development agencies should be in the business of changing preferences," and what implications does this have for empowerment. This is why Stern et al. (2005) suggest that development should be about providing a space where individuals can come and have a chance to form and reform their preferences themselves. (p. 262) In this line of thinking, what is important is the "processes" for decision making which might bring preference change rather than targeting and changing preferences themselves (p. 258).

Alternative view: policies that focus on processes and expanding freedoms

Sen (1990) had argued that individual preferences and utility theory are not an accurate measure of one's wellbeing, and rejects the notion of aggregating individual preferences to determine social welfare. The alternative approach to policy making that Stern et al. (2005) propose "recognizes the difficulties of choosing among an individual's preferences" and so the idea of maximizing utility "over a set of [aggregating] preferences," by trying to give people what they want, is dropped entirely. This move is therefore a shift towards "notion of capability, opportunity, or freedom, an approach that echoes both Sen and the Austrian school" as the basis of policy making. The capability approach stresses that what is important is not the outcome itself, but the alternative set of choices one could have made. In the Austrian school, Hayek (1984) sees the "market as a process of exercising mutually compatible freedoms." (as cited in Stern 2005, p 256)

In addition, since capabilities is about having the freedom to choose what one values, when we expand one's freedoms, there is a change in preferences and essentially a change in what one values. Changing what we value is the essence of "changing gender roles." (p. 256) As
argued in the earlier chapter, empowering women is achieved partly by expanding the possibilities of what women are able to do and changing people's attitudes towards gender roles that limit can act as constraints for women. Expanding freedoms is therefore synonymous to expanding the choice sets available to women that is socially accepted. However, women themselves have to play a role in the negotiation of social norms and in the creation of these new opportunities for women. Therefore, Stern et al. (2005) are concerned with moving the focus of policies towards the processes that enable women to do so. Policy shifts away from focusing on outcomes towards focusing on the "processes for making decisions” (p. 258). Processes put emphasis on decision making spaces, where people are given a chance to come together and "forge social decisions" and this idea "goes beyond the mere aggregation of preferences." (p. 263)

Policies on empowerment should be based on "expanding" capabilities, freedom, and opportunities, specifically,

"Under an approach based on freedom, welfare analysis of a policy requires an assessment of whether it will expand the range of opportunities of an individual or his or her freedom to act." (Stern 2005, p 256)

For example, in the village of Ait Iktel in Morocco, two men who were migrants in neighboring cities returned to build a community well and found that collective action can be effective in bringing about change, and it built “trust and cooperation” among one another. These migrant men were "cultural translators," to the villagers. Because of their experiences outside, they could bring back with them "new possibilities” for what the village could do and be. This led them to form a village development association, which would pool together remittances from
migrant workers, and invest them in other community led development projects. This was a stark contrast to the way development projects worked in these villages, where villagers would usually "receive the new road, ambulance... as gifts from outside." (World Bank 2002, as cited in Stern 2005, p. 259) Pigg (1993), a linguistic anthropologist, highlights that the word 'development' in Nepal, though translates to mean the same thing (as growth, or economic change) in its Sankrit origins as it does in English. However, in terms of signification, ‘development’ represents things that are material, and also foreign. Development takes its meaning from being non-Nepali or not local. But in this example from Morocco, we see a case, where development, comes from within, from an individual level. The villagers took advantage of the process of building the community well to "build a new organization, find new ways of behaving and a new capacity to solve problems.” With each projects, the villagers climb up a knowledge ladder, their preferences change, and they have new aspirations for themselves and their communities. (Stern 2005, p. 259)

**Women as decision makers in the RCT literature**

Stern et al. (2005) had emphasized on policies that focus on processes of how decisions are made for a society, rather than the outcomes they can generate. One of these processes involve having women in the decision making spaces, in the household or in the community. Duflo (2012) envisions empowerment in a similar way, and under three subsections, writes about "Women as Decision makers... Within the Household.. On the Farm... And Within the Community... as Policy Makers." However, her assumptions on economic behavior expose some of the same limitations I have pointed out earlier in the intra-household bargaining models,
particularly to do with the neoclassical idea of individual preferences. This is especially relevant in the next section where I review three RCT studies on women's political participation.

In the household level, since microfinance and conditional transfers are often aimed at women, on the basis that it will be put towards more productive outcomes, these programs also "implicitly recognizing that women are not entirely powerless" and that the members of the household have different preferences from one another, because "if households were harmonious entities... then the nominal ownership of money would not matter within the household," and it would not make a difference if the money was given to a man or a woman. (p. 1070)

It is important to note that the framework by which Dulfo (2012) analyses behavior of the members of the household is through the intra-household bargaining models. She writes that families are neither ruled by dictator [not] without discord,"mediate from cooperation to non cooperation, and members "have different preferences and ideas." (p. 1066) Duflo (2012) gives examples from other RCTs that also show this phenomena at play. Since there is a "lack of congruence in preferences," between a wife and her husband, if women are able to hide information, such as concealing their choice to use contraceptives from their husbands, then there is a lower incidence of fertility (Ashraf et. al. 2012, as cited in Duflo 2012, p 1066). One of the reasons why rotational savings have gained popularity, among women, is that it is a way "for

\[45\] In another recent study in the RCT literature, Ashraf et al. (2017) expand from the intra-household bargaining models, where it is assumed that husband and the wife are they key players in the bargaining process, to include girls as agents who can change their parent’s education investment decisions. Their experiment is based in schools in Zambia, where they find that girls are not taught skills to financially support themselves or assert themselves among others (especially older males), and often end up dropping out of school and marrying at an early age because they are economically dependent on men. This also puts them in the risk of HIV contamination and unwanted pregnancy. They examine whether teaching girls negotiation and interpersonal communication skills, on top of making them more aware of HIV, fertility, and the importance of staying in schools, can ultimately lead them to persuade their parents to invest more towards their education attainment.
women to keep savings away from their husbands" (Anderson and Baland 2002, as cited in Duflo 2012, p. 1067)

We see something similar on the farms as well, concerning land rights. Women's lands might be less productive, because women might have a weaker bargaining ability in the household, and therefore a lesser access to agriculture inputs. Even if women can rent her land to her husband, which would increase the productivity of that land and of the entire household, women usually never opt for this. This is because women have more insecure rights to property in these places, and there is more risk involved if a woman gives up farming rights to her husband, than the other way around. Instead, they continue to produce in their own individual lands, and this leads to "sheer waste, and literally makes families poorer" (Goldstein and Urdy 2005, as cited in Duflo 2012, p. 1070).

This last example about women forgoing giving their lands to their husbands also show that men and women will have “different policy preferences,” since for women, secure rights to their land, is key for increasing the productivity of her land. But women also want "policies that better reflect their own priorities" and that will "increase their bargaining power.” (p. 1070) This is the topic of discussion in Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004).

Before moving on, I should emphasize that all of these examples reinforce the fact that women are driven by strong, individual preferences. Women are driven by both self interests, such is the case when they chose to conceal their contraceptive choice, and which is why rotational savings are so popular. But at the same time, women are also more altruistic than men are towards overall household wellbeing, which studies about effects of transfer payments and micro-credit on children's health show. Women are more altruistic towards their children,
because they are guided by a different set of preferences than men. So the idea of fixed, 
individual preferences is still maintained. However, how these preferences are formed, is left out 
of this literature.

**Literature review of women's political participation**

**Fixed preferences in Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004):**

In 1993, an amendment to the Indian constitution was made to transfer more control 
(over expenditures) to local village councils. Then under the present reservation policy, a third of 
the local village councils in India, known as Gram Panchayats (GPs), are randomly selected by 
the state to be reserved for women as positions of chief. They select a new batch of reserved GPs 
in every election cycle. While voters elect council members, the council members elect a 
Pradhan and a Upa-Pradhan (vice-chief). So in the reserved councils, only women can be elected as the Pradhan. Across all GPs, it is also mandated that at least a third of the seats of council members, be reserved for women. (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004, p. 1410)

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) look into the type of complaints that are bought to a 
woman village chief of reserved GPs. They are able to take advantage of a mandated 
representation policy in India, as a random and exogenous event, that ushered women into local politics. They study whether there is any gendered outcomes in policy decisions, in terms of the type of public goods that are provisioned. This study has initiated two other seminal papers in the political participation literature (Beaman and Duflo 2009; and Beaman et al. 2012), which will be analyzed in their respective order. The first study is based in two Indian states of Rajasthan and West Bengal, while the subsequent studies are based in West Bengal.
Chattopadhayay and Duflo (2004) compare investments in public goods made in reserved and unreserved GPs. They find that the reservation not only alters policy decisions, but the decisions made reflect women's preferences over men's. There are no significant differences between the reserved and unreserved GPs (in terms of sample characteristics), given the random selection. They also control for other characteristics in the leaders that may explain for the policy decisions, but find that no other characteristics except for the gender of the leaders, explains for the outcomes. (p. 1411)

Chattopadhayay and Duflo (2004) make their inferences about the effects of a reservation policy from the idea of a representative democracy where citizens get elected based on the voter's preferences, so the elected citizens are representative of the voters. In particular, they look at the citizen candidate model of electoral competition where citizens chose whether to run as candidates, and the winner “implements their favorite policy.” There are citizens, who have “preferences…over a set of policies,” which represents what their position is. Each of them choose whether to run for the election or not, and if they do, they can implement their favorite policy. (Osbourne and Slivinski 1996, p. 65) The cost for running can be high, especially for women, and they have to compare it next to the benefits from winning. There is also perfect information among the citizens, in that "citizens know each other’s preferences, and can influence the final political outcome, by choosing whom to elect" (Chattopadhayay and Duflo 2004, p. 1415). This is an important assumption that I will return to later.

The decisions to run or not is based on the probability of them getting elected, over a fixed cost for running for an election. The runnings costs make a case of why there should be reservations, because running costs, in the absence of a reservation, tend to be higher for women.
When running costs are high, only women with “strong pro-women preferences run.” (p. 1417) These women are described as being not representative of the average woman. Reservations are also important, when women and men don’t have the same preferences (yet it’s less costly for men to run), as Duflo (2012), suggests that not only in the household bargaining process, but also in the public sphere, men and women have different policy preferences. So when preferences do not match and running costs are high, reservations that give quotas to women chiefs, improves the “median” or the average “women’s utility” significantly, by electing someone who wouldn’t have participated otherwise (p. 1419).

In other words, each voters in the group try to maximize their utility, and each person wants an outcome that benefits them the most. Median women, are the middle group of voters that have the ability to cast the decisive votes in the elections. Without reservations, both male and female candidates must have an equal chance of winning, in order to have an outcome around the median (male and female) voter's preference. The reservation gives a chance to voters to elect women who would not have run previously, but their preference match the most to the voter’s preferences, rather than women with the most extreme pro-women policies. (DeSilva 2016)

However, these assumptions raise some important questions and issues. Though the reservation puts more women in the positions of a village chief and gives a chance for women who would not have otherwise ran, and this itself is valuable, is there something we loose by moving away from electing "strong women" with "pro-women" preferences, versus electing average women? While the "strong women" are the outliers, the median women, represent the average or in other words, the norm, so they would also be less likely to deviate from social
expectations about about their roles. And while the policy outcomes, do reflect the preferences of women, is it enough to be constituted as empowerment? Especially, when it might not be making any transformative change in the prevailing gender inequities. Finally, Chattopadhayay and Duflo (2004) base their model on the citizen candidate model, as it would function in a representative democracy. This means that policy decisions is made by a casting a vote on people's fixed preferences, which is essentially a way of aggregating individual preferences, to make social decisions (that was made popular by Arrow 1963).

Turning to the results, the authors find that policy outcomes are closer to what women want compared to what men want. They find this out by testing whether Pradhans act towards complaints lodged by women more in reserved GPs as opposed to unreserved GPs. The cost of complaining for women decreases if the Pradhan is a woman. With the reservations, women have more incentives to bring out complaints they feel strongly about. Women Pradhans, under the reservation policy, invest more in public goods linked to women’s needs. They invest in drinking water and roads in West Bengal, and drinking water in Rajasthan. (p. 1429) However, the authors point out that it is not that a woman Pradhan is more “sensitive” and responsive to the complaints of women, or even both men and women. Simply, the outcomes are more favorable for women, because the preference of the Pradhan herself is more aligned to the preference of the women. (p. 1431- 1434) These results are unaffected even after controlling for women’s characteristics. For example, usually poorer and more illiterate women are elected when there is a reservation, but the outcomes are not affected by "weakness" of the women candidates (p. 1436).

Duflo (2012) suggests that the results from Chattopadhayay and Duflo (2004) show that women leaders "better represent the needs of women" and that "women are changing the realities
on the ground." This study is evident of the fact that women are occupying decision making spaces and play a defining role in creating new realities for other women, in line with their preferences. (p. 1071) However, the formation of women's preferences and needs is left out, and we encounter the same fate of the bargaining household models, where women come into the bargaining process with given and fixed preferences. Duflo (2012) also writes that the "patterns of complaints dovetails with gender responsibilities of men and women within the household and their employment opportunities" (p. 1070). While the policy outcomes reflect these complaints, in a space which is likely to have been male dominated, the outcomes themselves do not change "responsibilities" of men and women in the household. These complaints are made within their expected gender roles, and the outcomes do leave them unchanged, at least not directly. While it may now take less travel time for a woman to fetch drinking water from the well, and this frees up her productive time, she is still working within her assigned gender role. Beaman et. al. (2012) find that in West Bengal, where Pradhans had provided for clean water, the time spent on domestic work for girls has gone down by 18 minutes per day, but they conclude that this is not a significant amount of time freed to do other things. Duflo (2012) does address this argument and writes,

"even if they (outcomes in Duflo (2004)) do not bring about radical changes in women's status or in the way women are perceived, policies targeted towards women can have immediate consequences." (p. 1074)

I am not negating the fact that reservations have an immediate consequences that are valuable to the empowerment of women involved on both ends, but simply allowing women to exercise their preferences (in the voting process or while lodging complaints), or implementing
their fixed preferences, does not capture the type of empowerment that Stern et al. (2005), Sen (1990), and other feminists (Kabeer 1999, Batliwala 1994) envision.

Beaman and Duflo (2009) study whether exposure to female leaders can change people's perceptions about them in leadership roles. They assume that as people are more exposed to female leaders, they will reduce their “bias” (p. 1497). Though Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) show that reservations can have an effect in types of public goods provisioning, reflecting preferences of women, “little is known on the effects on women's prospects to being elected, as well as the voter's attitudes on women as leaders” (p. 1498).

The authors use hypothetical leader evaluations and the The Implication Association Tests (IAT) to study people's perception towards their village leaders. The econometric survey was is to examine the backgrounds of female leaders in the GPs and whether the reservation policy could lead to better electoral prospects for women. The PRA survey measures if there is an gendered impact in the allocation of public goods, whether women leaders allocate public goods differently. They sample villages in the Indian state of West Bengal that have had no reservation, one instance of reservation, and two or more instances of reservations.

In the econometric survey, they find that women are more likely to run and also to win elected seats in the GPs that have had more than two cycles of reservations (p. 1497). There are several channels through which reservations may have created a “pathway” for women to come into politics. First of all, there is a role model effect, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) show that women are “more likely to attend and participate” meetings in reserved GPs. Female Pradhans may have also created and reinforced a strong "network for women politicians," and this is similar to a role model effect. Political parties may also have an incentive to find "suitable
female Pradhans," especially if it increases their chances of gaining power, so they may encourage female leaders to "identify and train" potential candidates. Chattopadhyay et al (2004) also showed that women make different policy decisions, and voters “may learn to identify” and associate with their preferences over time. (as cited in Beaman et al. 2009, p. 1513)

Results from tests that measure people's perception about male and female leaders (the IAT test), show that although "social norms and deep preferences," which segregate gender into different roles, is "hard to erode," but biases towards female leaders, lessen with two rounds of exposure. They write, unlike social norms, beliefs held on "effectiveness are much more malleable, and they play a role in voting decisions." (p. 1501) Before talking about the results and assumptions in more depth, we need to unpack the term "bias," and compare it to preferences. A bias can be a preference or taste towards something, in a way that is considered unfair. But at the same time, it is does not need to be deeply held. For example, a bias can simply be a liking or disliking of something. This makes sense in the context of a IAT test, which is an impulse based, categorization test, which measures the response time of people to associate certain characteristics with images, in this case of men or women leaders. Therefore, how much the study actually addresses the innateness of biases themselves is questionable. Tastes and preferences are in a sense, more strongly formed judgement, which is why the authors differentiate a change between bias, versus a change between more deeply seated preferences. As a result, it is clear that exposure reduces bias, but it is less clear whether this study has completely abandoned the idea of fixed preferences, and what we are seeing is a change in preferences.
The assumptions that the authors make, is that reservations lead to more exposure, which reduces statistical discrimination, and therefore enhance women's electoral prospects. They assume that bias against females leaders are materialized through statistical or taste discrimination. In the absence of reservations, the two can also be “self reinforcing,” where taste discrimination, can prevent female candidates from being elected to the council and as Pradhans. This means that there is less information on the effectiveness of female leaders, for the subsequent election cycle, leading to statistical discrimination. Statistical discrimination is specifically prevalent when voters are “risk averse.” Therefore, having reservations for women, means that even if taste discrimination exists, it cannot prevent women from being elected into the GPs and as Pradhans. However, women's long run electoral prospects can improve, as reservations can reduce statistical discrimination. By ensuring that a certain number of women are elected, voters would have more information for successive rounds of elections, on the effectiveness of the female leaders. (p. 1521)

Hypothetical leader evaluations show vignettes of a hypothetical leader making a speech, responding to complaints, and the respondents need to evaluate the leader's "perceived performance and effectiveness," in terms of whether she or he addressed the concerns properly, whether they would be good at allocating resources. They also hear the leaders choosing to invest between two projects, a drinking water or an irrigation project, and the choices that the male and women leaders make is varied, so their choices appear “gender neutral.” (p. 1422) The hypothetical leader evaluations are designed in such a way that there are no observable or unobservable differences within the hypothetical male and female differences, so the only difference attributed to their performances, is "inferred" by the respondents, because of statistical
discrimination. In other words, in villages where there was only reservations once, due to a lack of information on the effectiveness of female candidates, villagers have a preference for male leaders, out of familiarity, and therefore statistically discriminate. (p. 1526) They use an activity based IAT to see whether being exposed to female leaders would change gender stereotypes in occupations for men and women. The use two taste-based IATs to measure "explicit and implicit" taste for men and women leaders in general. The first test measure how closely respondents associate male and female names to positive and negative attributes (1523). And the second test measures how closely respondents associate male and female images to these attributes (p. 1525).

The results show villages which never had a reservation, men judged male hypothetical leaders are being more effective than hypothetical female leaders. But being exposed to just one female leader, from reservations, can "erase statistical discrimination by the male villagers" (p. 1528). In twice reserved GPs, the difference in the evaluations of male and female leaders become indistinguishable. Results from IAT study show that in never reserved GPs, both males and females associate leadership qualities with men, and domestic activities with women. In once reserved GPs, both men and women have still hold biases towards female leaders, and associate female leaders which more negative qualities compared to male leaders. However with time, voters are more likely to associate women with leadership attributes (p. 1533).

Discrimination persists against female leaders because of a lack of information about their effectiveness, therefore, people chose to discriminate. The authors conclude saying,

“Although reservation does not make male villagers more sympathetic to the idea of female leaders, out IAT and speech and vignette results [hypothetical leader
evaluation tests] suggest that it makes them more likely to associate women with leadership and improves their evaluation of female leaders.” (p. 1533)

If people were to be more sympathetic towards women leaders, it could mean that they have a preference for female leaders. Or in other words, they would have built a taste for female leaders and taste discrimination would decrease. But there is no change in taste discrimination. So what has happened through reservations is that there is an improvement in the information given to men and women about female leaders. Now women can also be seen as good leaders. Their taste has not changed, but their information sets have. The study shows the effect of a change in information, which is not that same as the effect of a change in preferences. But it is changes in preferences or the changes in what we value which initiates a change in deeply held gender roles (Stern 2005, p. 256).

Change in preferences?

Beaman et al. (2012) find that reservations have long term effect, by changing the aspirations of parents for their daughters, and of adolescent girls for themselves, in terms of expanding ideas of what women are able to achieve, and in turn shaping education and career choices. The authors recognize gender as being "at least partially" socially constructed, and attribute to contributions from sociology and social cognitive theory, which "identifies belief in one's own ability (self efficacy) as a key mechanism for personal agency," and this aspiration in oneself, correlates with the education and career choices one makes. The way reservation leads to a change in aspirations of parents and children, is through a role model effect. Being able to

46 In their conclusion, Beaman et al. (2009) write that “results provide striking evidence that although ten years of exposure to women leaders may not have changed voters' stated preference for male leaders, by giving voters a chance to learn about the effectiveness of women leaders, they have effectively improved women’s access to political office” (p. 1533)
see women in their own villages in a non-stereotypical occupation of a political leader, breaks stereotypes about gender roles, helps other girls, as well as their parents, identify more easily with them, and see a different roles of oneself or their daughters. (p. 582)

The authors carry out a household survey to measure educational attainment, and a time use survey on how much adults and adolescents spend on various agricultural and domestic activities. Then an adult questionnaire asks parent's about their aspirations for adolescents, where the four questions cover different aspects of aspirations. They find that in villages with no reservations, parents have higher aspirations for boys. But in villages with two election cycles, the gap in aspirations for boys an girls shrinks. But given that the aspirations of parents for boys has not changed, the only reason why the gap between aspirations for boys and girls has shrunk, is because parents have higher aspirations for girls. (p. 584)

However, the authors also try to see whether changing opportunities for women, in education, or in the labour market, led to these change in aspirations, and modified education and occupation choices. Duflo (2012) had reasoned that empowerment can be achieved by changing the external environment or the constraints that are faced by resource poor households. Increasing opportunities in the labour market, and providing more information to parents on returns to education, could give parents more incentives to invest in women's human capital. Stern et al. (2005) distinguishes between the effects of changing information, about the types of jobs that women can do, and the opportunities that exist for them, versus, the effects of changing preferences of parents about the different roles that women can play, when assessing how policy can be most effective. Beaman et al. (2012) find that reduction in the gender gap in education is

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47 They are, "wishes child to have a high-education job, wishes child to marry after 18, wishes child to graduate or get higher education, wished child to be Pradhan"
not due to a "change in the [external] environment.” Specifically, they find that reservations made no improvements to the education or labour market outcomes of people aged between 16 to 30 years. These are the people who parents of the current adolescents would look up to to “form expectations” about their children's future, and gain information in terms of expected returns to education. There is also no evidence that female leaders invested towards expanding opportunities in education for girls by investing more in educational infrastructure. (p. 585)

There are two channels through which reservations and having women as leaders can change aspirations. Female leaders can change aspirations of parents and girls by initiating policies that make running easier for women, and therefore, show girls that it is possible to be in roles such as a Pradhan, which they didn't think was possible before. I understand this to mean as expanding the choice sets available to a woman in a “material” level (Kabeer 1999, p. 442). This could also mean, as Stern et al. (2005) would suggest, that there is a change in women's “external constraints” (p. 225). Or female leaders can change aspirations by simply being a role model of a "successful woman.” This channel can mean expanding the choice sets, or alternative set of realities available to women in a discursive and imaginative level (Kabeer 1999, p. 442). In Stern et al. (2005) and Appadurai's (2004) term, this would mean relaxing women’s internal constraints (in terms of self perceptions and what they think they are able to do).

However, as mentioned above, Beaman et al. (2012) highlight that aspirations were not changed through a change in people's external environment. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) showed that female leader invest in public goods that are more in line with preferences of women. This would have decreased the time that girls spend on domestic chores. By this reasoning, female leaders could also have invested more into the schooling of girls. However,
there is less evidence that aspirations were changed through this channel, by expanding economic opportunities.\textsuperscript{48} The role model effect started in the second cycle of elections, and there is evidence for why this is was the pathway through which female leaders raised aspirations if we considered the time it took for the effect to take place (p. 585). In the first reservation cycle, there is change in the type of public goods that are provisioned by women leaders (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). By the second reservation cycle, there is no difference in the provisioning of public goods, between once or twice reserved GPs. Beaman et al. (2009) had suggested that in the first reservation cycle, voters have low opinions for women as leaders compared to men, but in twice reserved GPs, voters have a chance to update their information about the effectiveness of female leadership and see them in a more positive light. They are also more likely to elect women in GPs for unreserved seats. Therefore the authors of the 2012 study, Beaman et al. (2012) can conclude that,

"The timing of the effect on aspirations and education is consistent with the time it takes for female leaders to be seen in a positive light.” (p. 586)

Stern et al. (2005) had made an argument that preferences can change, even in the absence of an economic change. What Beaman et al. (2012) show is that even without increasing economic opportunities, parents were able to change aspirations for their daughters. Increasing educational and occupational opportunities must not be confused with increasing freedoms and opportunities, in the capability approach. But when women leaders are a role model to girls and their parents, they create new possibilities about the roles that women and girls are able to play.

\textsuperscript{48} The time spent on domestic chores for girls only decreased by 18 minutes.
This idea is closer to the capability approach. The choices, opportunities, and freedoms do not only exist in a material, economic sense, but they also exist at the discursive level.

**Final notes on political participation and empowerment**

Rather than focusing on policy outcomes, Stern et al. (2005) highlighted that policy should focus on the processes of how social decision making is carried out. Reservations ensure that women are able to occupy decision making spaces, by being a member as well as a leader of village councils, which are important spaces where the communities negotiate the allocation of public resources. The literature on political participation and reservations, is also centered around analyzing a woman outside of her household and in her community. While studies on micro-credit and cash transfers that are reviewed in Duflo (2012) still assume that a woman’s default place is in the household (p. 1066).

There are three outcomes of the reservation policies. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) suggests that the provision of public goods when the Pradhan is a woman, is more in line with preferences of other women in the villages. Beaman et al. (2009) find that exposure to female leaders lowers statistical discrimination, and therefore voter's bias against women as leaders. Women are also more likely to run in elections in twice reserved GPs. Beaman et al. (2012) find that reservations in the long term, changes the aspirations of girls of themselves, and aspirations of parents for their daughters, and as a result, the gender gap in education attainment decreases. Are these outcomes evidence of empowerment?

I have used the argument earlier that empowerment is the “ability to make choices” (Kabeer 1999, p. 436) and choices that are in line with one's preferences. However, preferences are socially constructed are thus are changeable (Agarwal 1997). Gender
Empowerment can therefore be seen as a process in which existing preferences of women are challenged and reformed, as well as the preferences of others towards women. Women's own preferences might be not need to change, but what may be constraining them is the preferences of others towards women and what they should be and do. Empowerment goes beyond changing women's self perception about their abilities but also other people's perceptions towards women. Empowerment should give women an ability aspire for more and see a different role to oneself. This Sen’s (1999) idea of expanding freedoms, where women have more choices and possibilities that are socially acceptable. But women also should have a role in expanding freedoms, in negotiating social norms, and creating these new opportunities.

Finally, we need to be able to identify a change in preferences and also who's preferences are being changed (Stern et al. 2005). The Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) study may be about making choices based on women's preferences, while findings in the second and third paper show a possibility that preferences of others towards women may have changed. These are voter's preferences for women as leaders and also preferences of parents towards the type of women they want their daughters to be. A girl's own preferences for the future may have changed and part of her change in aspirations comes from how others (and mainly her parents) see her abilities.

These papers look at participation on a more instrumental way, relative to women's empowerment, by measuring the impacts of having women as leaders on a community. But the act of women participating as members of the Panchayat or as Pradhans, is also a part of empowerment in its intrinsic sense, because reservations ensure that women have a role in public decision making spaces. Even if the same outcomes above were achieved and still benefited
women, but was a result of a top down intervention, such as through the role of the government or by a group of male decision makers (in the GPs), it is qualitatively different from women giving an opportunity to be in those roles.

In Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004), while women occupy a decision making space and decide on outcomes that are in line with preferences of other women, preferences itself are given as fixed, and the types of complaints made by women or the public goods that are distributed do not make any transformative change in women's preexisting gender roles. This study also reads like the social choice literature, because the Pradhans are in a sense aggregating individual preferences of the voters and giving people what they want.49

In Beaman et al. (2009), after two reservation cycles there is a change in voters' bias towards female leaders, but that does not mean there is a change in their preferences. The authors make the assumption that reservations increase voter's information about female leaders and that reduces statistical discrimination, while taste discrimination does not necessarily change. They are following neoclassical theories of discrimination, which makes discrimination a phenomena that can be explained through rational choice, people chose to discriminate out of prejudice or a lack of information.50 They also largely ignore that discrimination can be an institutional phenomena, which can persist, even if people do not choose to discriminate (Albelda et al.

49 And also because what the average women want is what the female Pradhan herself wants.
50 Becker suggests that a person has a “taste to discriminate,” when they “experiences disutility from associating with certain people” so there is a “willingness to pay to avoid” any connections with those people. Discriminators can be consumers, employers and employees, who are rational individuals, who are exercising their preferences, and thus maximizing their utility. (as cited in Albelda et al. 2009, p. 90-93) Statistical discrimination arises because of an information failure, when (still rational) agents have to make decisions “under conditions of imperfect and incomplete information.” Information problem means that there are high transaction costs (“time plus money spent to identify and negotiate price, quality, or location of employers and employees”), and so employers have an incentive to apply stereotypes and widely held characteristics of the group to an individual member, rather than “base hiring or wage setting decisions on the individual’s actual abilities.” Unlike the first type of discrimination, this isn’t based on taste and prejudice. (Albelda et al. 2009, p. 93-96)
2009). If preferences were to change, there may have been a decrease in taste discrimination, because in this form of discrimination, people choose to discriminate because they have a fixed preference about certain groups of people over others. These preferences can be in the form of more deeply held prejudices but not necessarily biases. In short, taste discrimination means that people hold prejudices against others and choose to discriminate, while statistical discrimination is not based on prejudice. What we see here is the effect of a change in information, and not preferences. By this logic voters are not inherently prejudiced towards women, but they simply want a good leader. Voters have a taste or preference for a good leader. But their information set of what constitutes a good leader is based on things they see. If there are no women leaders to draw from, then there is an information failure. Thus they associate good leadership qualities with men. The two cycles of reservations update their information set of what constitute a good leader, and now they are more likely to identify with women as leaders.\footnote{The IAT test looks at how our brain associates certain attributes to men and women (Beaman et al. 2009). However, in this paper, it is not clear whether a bias is the same as a prejudice. Since people don’t have enough information, they fall back on their implicit bias. Simply from their social experiences, learning from what they see, they associate certain attributes to gender. This is what the authors assume with information failure. It is not that people are consciously discriminating, but they subconsciously rely on implicit associations, because they don’t have enough information about women as leaders. Prejudice may be something more conscious and have a deliberate action towards people.}

To sum up, Beaman et al. (2009) still maintains the idea of fixed preferences, a neoclassical understanding of discrimination, and sees the behavior change as an effect of information change. However, Beaman et al. (2012) may be showing a gradual shift away from the neoclassical models of fixed preferences, since it posits a possibility that preferences are changing of parents and young girls, through a role model effect.

In Beaman et al. (2012), without even increasing any economic opportunities, parents change their aspirations for their daughters and the gender gap in education attainment shrinks.
Increasing aspirations means to project different possibilities of what one can be. Increasing economic opportunities through the labour market or by investing in more education, does not seem to be enough. These findings seem more in line with the idea of increasing freedoms, opportunities, and capabilities.

However, is the role model effect not the same as reducing a person's statistical bias? In Beaman et al. (2012), changing an individual's aspiration changes an individual's own assessment of their capabilities (parent's assessments of their daughters capabilities, and daughter's of themselves). Whereas the Beaman et al. (2009) study is concerned with changing other people's assessments about women's capabilities, which is understood as changing biases about what a woman can do. But in either cases, there is an expansion of capabilities.

This leads us to two question. Is changing a girl's own information set about what she is capable of, as the role model effect implies, the same as changing preferences? While changing other people's information about a woman, as reducing bias implies, not considered a change in preferences?

Beaman et al. (2012) try to account for this by trying to control for the change in education attainment and labour market attainment of young adults. These are the age group that parents look towards to gain information on returns to education for their adolescent daughters. By showing that this information channel has no affect on aspirations, and education choice, they isolate a role model effect as the channel by which aspirations and subsequently education decision change in favor of women.

The final set of contradiction is if we treat our end goal as positive labour market or education outcomes for girls, then does it matter much to separate the effects of a change in
information from the effects of a change in preferences, in how we assess this policy outcome? If both mechanisms can be effective, shouldn't policy work through both channels simultaneously? We’ve come across this issue in Stern et al. (2005). In this case, the end goal in a sense, or the desired outcome, is not just to increase education and labour market outcomes for girls. But the authors also measure other aspects of aspirations that are not related to education and the careers the children will go on to have. The authors also want to see if parents have aspirations for their daughters to become a Pradhan one day. A Pradhan is not like the other jobs in the labour market. So the fact that their results show that parent's have more aspirations for their daughters to become Pradhans after the reservations, suggests that these are aspirations change for types of roles in the future that cannot be accounted for with information about returns to education.
Conclusion:

It seems that in Stern (2005) or in the findings from a reservation policy in Beaman (2012) that the rhetoric of development policies has been changing towards providing spaces to allow women to openly contest social norms and change their preferences or the preferences of others towards them, and essentially create new ideas and images of femininity. But the question still remains: to what extent is the mainstream development economics literature still boxed into the neoclassical paradigm, and how much progress has there been in accommodating feminist critiques?

I chose to focus on the branch of development RCT literature concerning women’s political participation because it more clearly showed a movement away from neoclassical assumptions of fixed preferences towards the idea of endogenous preferences, which made evident that some policies targeted at the political empowerment of women can change social norms (along the line of gender roles) and gender relations.

Others have also tried to integrate these ideas into more mainstream economics literature supported by studies such as Beaman et al. (2012). Hoff and Stiglitz (2017) who “attempt to broaden [the] economic discourse” by bringing in the idea that individual behavior is socially determined, and that our social influences shape behavior by changing our preferences and perceptions. Although they largely attribute these insights to behavioral economics, a field that I have not explored in my paper, the implications of the behavioral literature on mainstream economics is nonetheless the same as the implications from feminist economists, that our experiences and social norms can change our preferences and self perceptions (Sen). Their understanding of individuals as social beings is similar to what we have seen in Sen (1990),
where “prolonged exposure to a given social context shapes who people are” (Hoff and Stiglitz 2017, p. 26). One of the particular avenues they suggest through which individual preferences can be changed is through exposure to female leaders, where they are referring to the role model effect that was evident in Beaman (2012).52

Chopra and Muller (2016), in a publication that tries to link ideas that have emerged about women’s empowerment to development practices,53 write that the role model effects for younger generation of girls as seen in Beaman et al. (2012) does not only change their self-aspirations but “have in turn the power to slowly change gender roles over time” (p. 5). Though I have not come across feminist literature that has picked up directly on role model effects that Beaman et al. (2012) find, Kabeer (2005) talks about women’s participation in local politics in a positive light, and her reasoning can give us a way of reinterpreting the findings from Chattopadhyay and Duflo’s (2004).54 She focuses her discussions on the GPs in India and the reservation policy for women and minorities. Although there can be an elite capture of women from higher castes, or women may be “proxies” for their husbands or other men in their families,55 she suggests that over time “women become more experienced in the political arena” and gain “self confidence.” As they start to believe in themselves as independent, and competent

52 Hoff and Stiglitz (2017) cite Beaman et al. (2009, 2012) to highlight how “rigidities” in societies can be overcome when “beliefs and preferences of large numbers of individuals change” as a result of an exogenous event such as the “political reservations for women as village leaders in randomly selected villages in India” (p. 30).

53 “Connecting Perspectives on Women’s Empowerment” is a report published by the Institute of Development Studies in 2016, and is largely concerned with explaining how ideas of empowerment have evolved and how it can link to development.

54 Though Kabeer (2005) is more critical of the agenda that has tried to usher them into national politics, and the limited effects it has actually on women’s empowerment, she sees the importance of having woman in local politics, as the decisions made at that level directly implicates the lives of the poor.

55 Female leader’s characteristics was something that Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) had controlled for the same reasons, Pradhans under the reservations tended to come from more poorer and illiterate backgrounds. They find that this channel has no effect.
leaders, they also begin to question existing “priorities of the panchayat” that may have not benefitted their own interests, and over time their presence gives a chance for “different set of priorities to be expressed” that were not possible before.

It is not clear whether Kabeer (2005) may be referring to Chattopadhyay and Duflo’s (2004) findings, though it can be likely that she is as the outcomes are very similar. But it is interesting that she places emphasis on the fact that building confidence in one’s own leadership ability, instead of relying on the abilities of other men in their family, and then being able to assert one’s own set of priorities over existing (and more likely male-centric) priorities, can have a positive effect on changing gender relations and roles over time. Seeing Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) from this perspective, may lead us to interpret their findings in a different way, and not by simply exposing the limitations of individual preferences, as I have done earlier. The fact that women are able to bring forward their priorities, can set into motion newer ways of imagining women’s roles in society. Beaman et al. (2009) show that voters over time start to see the effectiveness of female leaders and are more likely to vote for them in even unreserved GPs. And over a longer term, Beaman et al. (2012) shows that female leaders have an effect on changing parents aspirations towards what sort of women they would like their daughters to be, and also change aspirations of girls themselves.

However, using these studies and particularly the implications that Beaman (2012) has had, I cannot argue that this is the norm throughout the mainstream development literature. In the micro-finance literature, one does not have to look hard to find studies that show the limited

56 I had argued that because the study still maintains the idea of fixed preference, being able simply exercise one’s own preference does not adequately capture women’s empowerment, if part of empowerment is also captured by preference change.
abilities of micro-credit loans on women’s empowerment. Cornwall (2016) is critical of how micro-credit, or access to financial resources, translates to the types of empowerment that feminists have advocated for. Access to resources also does not ensure a “shift in consciousness" of women. Women need to be both aware and able to assert themselves from restrictive gender roles and expectations that keep them “locked into situations of subordination and dependency.” (p. 345) From the RCT literature, Banerjee et al. (2009) find that women who took out loans in the treatment areas were no more likely to make decisions on household spending, investment, or education of their children. Households in treatment areas are also not more likely to have their girls enrolled in school. (p. 14) But as Kabeer (1999) has pointed out, decision making on children’s health and education can be pre-assigned to women’s roles as mothers, and therefore a change in this decision making ability does not represent a change in agency of women in a transformative sense. In the case of micro finance, studies have therefore pointed out that there is a change in neither of those things.

Cornwall (2016) also writes that though the “World Bank has taken up Kabeer’s (1999) work” on defining and measuring empowerment, it has emphasized more on the access to financial resources or “assets” dimensions, and has largely ignored the “relational nature of

57 At the same time, there are also studies from feminists (Kabeer 2001, 2005) which show that micro-credit does lead to positive outcomes, in places where women have been “excluded” from the formal economy, having access to micro-credit loans has “led to changes in women’s own perceptions and their role in household decision making.”

58 The assumption was based on findings by Lundberg et al. (1997) who among many other studies compare decisions of men and women on child health and education, and show that women spend more on health and education of their children. So giving women more spending ability, should also increase not only these outcomes, but also their “decision making” ability or “bargaining power.” (as cited in Banerjee et al. 2009)

59 The authors of “Poor Economics,” Banerjee and Duflo (2011) also comment on studies about the effects of micro-finance on women’s lives, “on the other hand, there was no sign of a radical transformation. We found no evidence that women were feeling more empowered, at least along measurable dimensions. They were not, for example, exercising greater control over how the household spent its money. Nor did we see any differences in spending on education or health, or in the probability that kids would be enrolled in private schools.”

60 I write about this in chapter 2.
empowerment.” (p. 345) The relational nature of empowerment highlights the importance of relationships and an understanding that the individual is a part of a collective. So it cannot be left up to the individual woman to change more structural gender inequalities that inflict might them. However, in cases from India and Bangladesh, women’s engagement with micro-finance organizations in the long run and being a part of group, has opened up avenues for their empowerment elsewhere, such as showing more instances of political participation (Kabeer 2005, p. 18).

Political participation is one of the routes towards women’s empowerment. Policies such as the reservation system in India puts women in decision making spaces, and they are not simply occupying these spaces in a token way, but are also active participants. Reservations over time have also changed perceptions about what women are able to do in society. However, there are obvious limitations of having such a narrow focus. One form of empowerment cannot be generalized into other parts of a woman’s lives (Cornwall 2016). The effect of reservation policies in India on women’s political empowerment also cannot be applicable to experience in other countries with different political and social context. Finally, this particular positive instance in development and policy making, cannot be generalized to the success development and policy making has had on other parts of women’s empowerment.

But if we can take away one thing then it might be the fact that the mainstream economics literature, in development and in general, is potentially becoming more in tune towards something that is fundamentally true about us men and women, that we are a part of something bigger than us (whether it is our family or the academic institution we are in), and our
ideas, desires, and aspirations are always being shaped, challenged, and changed by what we are surrounded by.


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