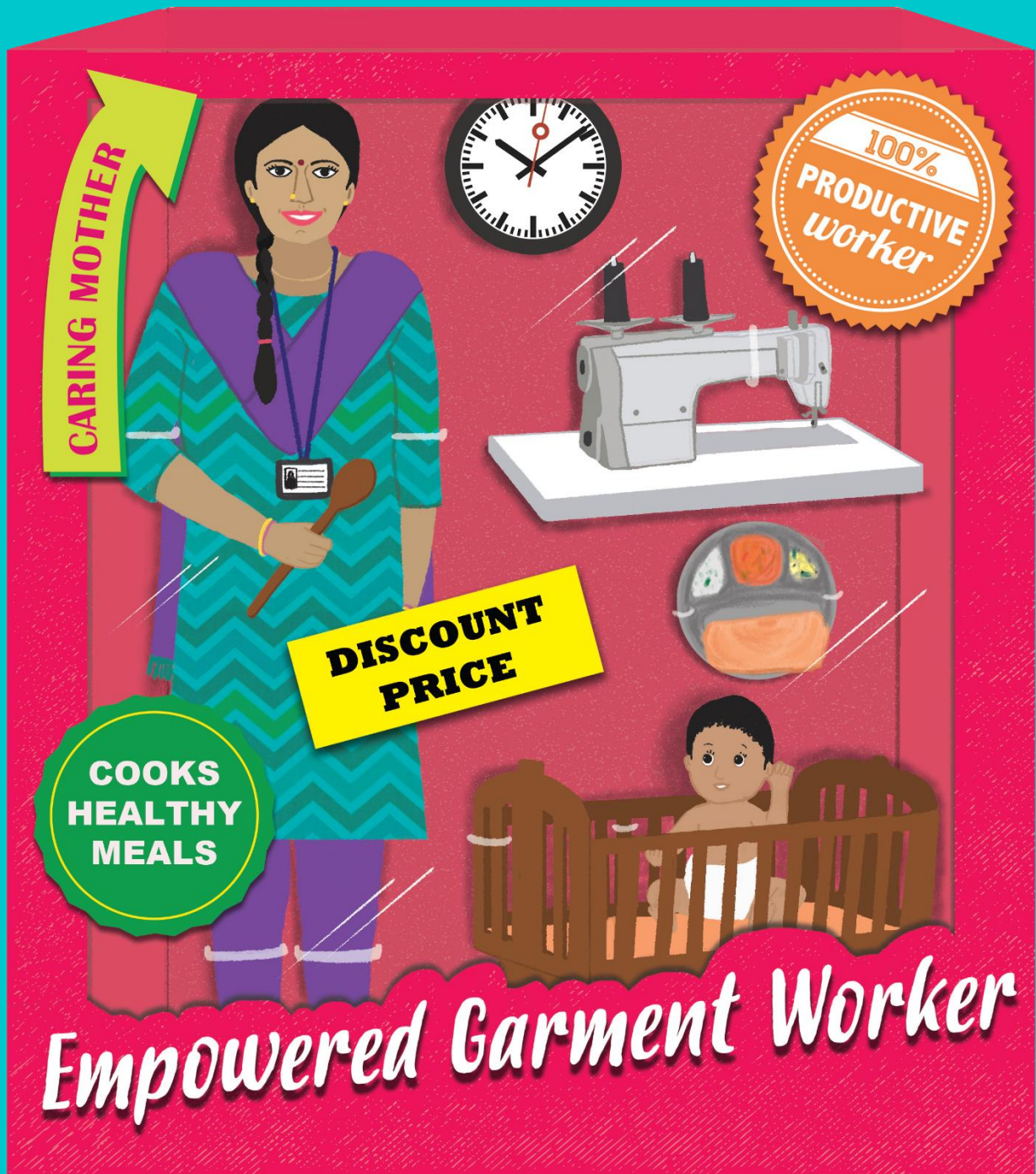


# Engendering empowerment for women garment workers?

An analysis of the gender reality of 'Women in Factories' participants in South India



Emma Vogt

Master thesis for Sociology of Development and Change, Wageningen University

**Author:** Emma Vogt

**Registration number:** 940506901100

**Course code:** SDC-80436

**Supervisor:** dr. E.D. Rasch

Submitted February 2018

Cover illustration by Shikha Nambiar of Sunny Skies Starry Eyes Illustrations

## Abstract

In a context of concerns over labor conditions in the global garment sector, garment brands and retailers are increasingly engaged in corporate social responsibility initiatives. Women's empowerment is a recurrent theme in these initiatives. Based on ethnographic field research in Bangalore, this research analyses the gender reality of women garment workers in South India who participated in a brand-sponsored empowerment initiative: Walmart's Women in Factories program. The research shows that this program is based on a liberal approach to empowerment, encouraging participants to rely on their individual agency to deal with structural inequalities inherent to the garment sector. While gender equality is among the key topics covered by the Women in Factories program, gendered divisions of labor continue to be pervasive in the women participants' working and home lives. In the garment factories, the supervisory and managerial levels do not reflect the gender ratio of the garment workforce. At home, the responsibility to take care of household tasks is mostly borne by women. The respondents make sense of the gendered divisions of labor in their lives by referring to essentialist notions of gender. The internalization of gender stereotypes can be understood as an element of patriarchal hegemony. The respondents' stories also show the relevance of their socioeconomic status and age as other systems of oppression that intersect with gender to create a 'matrix of domination'. In the respondents' reflections on the gender norms they are experiencing, most want to increase equality between male and female household members. However, they do not anticipate significant changes in their workplace. It seems that their career ambitions are also influenced by the hiring policies of their factories. With respect to the future, the women respondents are mostly relating their dreams to their kids and the opportunities that they will have, thanks, in part, to their mothers' work in the garment sector. The findings illustrate the limits to agency within liberal empowerment, and contribute to an understanding of agency within gender performativity, pointing to the relevance of power inequalities.

*Key words: empowerment, gender, corporate social responsibility, garment industry, gender performativity, India*

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their contributions and support during the research process.

Elisabet Rasch, my supervisor at Wageningen University. I'm really glad I got to work with her! In my bachelor's program, after having completed a full year of courses that were exclusively taught by male professors and lecturers (barring a guest lecturer or two), her lectures on gender and the identity of the researcher in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year felt like a breath of fresh air. For this research project, she encouraged me to 'think big': to explore & define what I wanted to research, without worrying about all the boundaries that might keep me from getting there. Her comments & advice throughout the writing phase were always thoughtful and constructive, helping me to figure out how to make the most of my research material.

Maria, Simon & Manish, whose house in Bangalore became my 'home away from home' for 3 months. They went above & beyond to make sure I was comfortable, gave me great advice, and taught me a lot about India in our conversations over Maria's delicious home-cooked meals.

Lathasha and Lisi, the interpreters who helped me navigate Bangalore, both literally and figuratively.

Shankar, Sathish, Sushma, and everyone from Swasti who helped me to bring this research project to fruition, and provided their insights on the Women in Factories program and Bangalore's garment industry.

Tariro and Ganga, two young, strong, talented women whom I met in Bangalore, and with whom I got to explore the city and its surroundings. I cherish the memories we've made in India, and am excited to see where their journeys will take them next.

My parents, who have cheered me on from the sidelines through video calls & text messages, sharing in both my victories and frustrations throughout this process.

Megan, who is such a supportive friend, always there to catch up & send supportive messages from wherever she happens to be - from Amsterdam to Disney World to Washington.

Martje, Alejandro, and everyone at SOMO (where I first developed the idea for this research) who has encouraged me to go on this journey.

The informants who provided me with useful background information to contextualize my findings.

All the respondents who shared their stories & perspectives with me.

This thesis would not have been the same without you.

Thank you!

-Emma



# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Table of Contents.....	6
1. Introduction.....	8
2. Theoretical framework.....	12
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 Gender and intersectionality at home and in the workplace .....	12
• The reproduction of gender inequality in the workplace .....	15
2.3 Women in Development, Women and Development: Entering women into the development equation.....	16
2.4 Gender and Development and the introduction of empowerment.....	17
2.5 (Mis)understanding 'empowerment'.....	18
• 2.5.1 A popular goal.....	18
• 2.5.2 Liberating or liberal empowerment? .....	19
2.6 Conclusion .....	21
3. Context.....	23
3.1 Introduction.....	23
3.2 The Indian, Bangalorean and global garment industry .....	23
3.3 Gender in India.....	24
3.4 Corporate Social Responsibility .....	25
4. Methodology .....	27
4.1 Introduction.....	27
4.2.1 Establishing and approaching 'the field' .....	27
4.2.2 Selecting the factories.....	28
4.2.3 Selecting the respondents.....	29
4.2.4 Informants .....	32
4.3 Research tools .....	33
• 4.3.1 Participant observation.....	33
• 4.3.2 Interviews.....	34
• 4.3.3 Analysis of publications about the Women in Factories program.....	36
4.4 Synthesis and analysis of data.....	37

4.5 Negotiated access; reflection on positionality .....	37
4.6 Conclusion .....	40
5. Women in Factories: context, contents, structure, procedure.....	41
5.1 Introduction.....	41
5.2.1 The Women in Factories program: background .....	42
5.2.2 The Women in Factories program in India.....	42
5.2.3 Who to 'empower'? The selection procedure .....	46
5.2.4 'Happy factory, happy workers': instrumentalist understanding of empowerment.....	47
5.2.5 Normalizing the 'inequality regime' .....	48
5.3 Other empowerment programs.....	50
• 5.3.1 Conception of the Women's Supervisory Training Program.....	50
• 5.3.2 Continuation as Fair Wear Foundation program .....	51
• 5.3.3 Key differences with the Women in Factories program.....	52
5.4 Conclusion .....	53
6. Navigating gender roles at work and at home .....	55
6.1 Introduction.....	55
6.2 A day in the life - from home to work, and back .....	56
6.2.2 Gender at work .....	57
6.2.3 The 'inequality regime' in practice: hierarchy in communication and architecture.....	59
6.3.1 The second shift .....	61
6.3.2 Managing finances.....	63
6.4 Expectations and responsibilities around marriage .....	65
6.5 Conclusion .....	69
7. Envisioning the future: power to and power from within .....	70
7.1 Introduction.....	70
7.2 'I can be like a man': reflecting on gender roles and anticipating change.....	71
7.3 Envisioning the future: 'all about the kids' .....	72
7.4 Ambitions within limiting structures.....	75
7.5 Conclusion .....	78
8. Conclusion.....	79
References.....	81

# 1. Introduction

As the global garment industry is under increasing scrutiny from its consumers and civil society organizations, two different stories have emerged. The first is a shocking story of all the ways in which the garment industry is failing the workers in its supply chain, as well as the environment. The 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh (Al-Mahmood 2013) is among the key events in this story, and various other health and safety risks, as well as issues related to the workers' remuneration, have been revealed since. Gender matters in the garment industry - globally, women make up 68% of the garment workforce, while they are underrepresented in positions of power (BSR 2017, Sisters for Change 2016). Women are also more vulnerable to harassment on the workplace, violence and discrimination (Kashyap 2017). As a response to the bleak image that has arisen from the reports on these issues, garment retailers have started to write a different story, which highlights how their industry is changing for the better, by becoming more sustainable, and improving the lives of the workers in their supply chain. 'Sustainable' and 'circular' are keywords here, and so is 'empowerment'. Retailers and brands have become engaged in partnerships with NGOs and other non-profit actors to benefit from their long-standing expertise on these topics.

The involvement of multi-million global brands in interventions that intend to produce 'empowerment' for marginalized people raises questions about whose interests are served by these interventions, and about their potential to subvert asymmetrical power relations that are inherent to the global garments supply chain. As some scholars have argued that the concept of empowerment has been 'taken hostage' (Calvès 2009), it is important to examine how 'empowerment' is conceptualized by a specific program, in order to understand its potential to be "liberating" (Sardenberg 2008). Agency is a key concept here, and the examination of the everyday experiences of participants of an empowerment program reveals how empowerment is related to different forms of agency.

The case of the 'Women in Factories' program exemplifies the power difference between the initiator of the empowerment program and the people it targets very well, considering that Walmart is the world's largest retailer (Gensler 2017), whereas the women targeted by its empowerment program receive minimal remunerations for the labor that they contribute to the company's supply chain (GFA and BCG 2017). I focus on the experiences of women who took part in this program in India, where women's subordination is persistent due to patriarchal structures in society (DW News 2018). Thus, it is also interesting to see how participants of the empowerment program navigate the gender norms that they are faced with in their everyday experiences.

The research central to this thesis examines the meaning of 'empowerment' as it has been operationalized by the Women in Factories program, and considers how gender and other



'systems of oppression' (Hill Collins 1990) affect the extent to which women who participated in this program in South India can make purposeful choices for themselves and their families. Turning to the 'power' in 'empowerment', it analyzes how different types of power as defined by feminist scholars (Luttrell et al. 2009) manifest themselves in the women respondents' dreams for their future.

With this research I aim at contributing to the academic debate on the concept of 'empowerment' in the domain of corporate social responsibility (CSR), and its implications for different forms of agency. I combine the perspective of the corporation (Walmart) and the women workers who are targeted by the empowerment initiative to examine the implications of a 'liberal' approach to empowerment (Sardenberg 2008). Furthermore, I intend to contribute to knowledge about brand-sponsored empowerment initiatives and the everyday experiences of women garment workers who participate in these initiatives. This reveals the relevance of the empowerment program for shaping the range of choices that are available to them, and shows how empowerment programs could be improved so as to become more 'liberating' (Sardenberg 2008). As women garment workers in South India deal with a 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins 1990) based on their gender, socio-economic status, and age, among other systems of oppression, it is useful to understand the potential of empowerment programs as a way to either keep these structures in place, or to challenge them. As I will show in Chapter 2 on my theoretical framework, I have incorporated normative concepts originating from feminist studies into the analysis of this issue.

Based on the purpose defined above, this research is centered around the following central question:

*How do participants of the Women in Factories program experience and perform gender roles in their everyday interactions, and how do they envision their future?*

To operationalize the research question, I have made several choices on the demarcation of my research field. First of all, I examined the background and contents of the Women in Factories program, focusing on its interpretation of empowerment. Secondly, to study the participants' experiences with gender roles in everyday interactions, I focused on divisions of labor across gender lines in their workplaces and their home lives. To contextualize the respondents' experiences with gender, I also looked for other relevant identity markers that arose from their stories, and used the concept of the 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins 1990) to analyze the relationship between these different aspects of their identities. Finally, in my interviews with the women participants, I asked them to reflect on the current gender norms that they are facing, and also to describe their hopes for the future, both career-wise and regarding their personal lives.

The thesis is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework introduces and contextualizes the concepts that are central to the analysis of the Women in Factories

program, and the women respondents' experiences with gender at home and at their workplaces. Subsequently, I give an overview of the relevant context for this thesis, with respect to the global garment industry, gender in India, and corporate social responsibility efforts from garment brands and retailers. This is followed by a chapter in which the research methodology is outlined, describing how 'the field' was defined, how I selected the research respondents and informants, what methods I used, and how my positionality affected the research.

Chapter 5, then, is the first of three chapters that present the empirical findings of the research. In this chapter I describe the origins of the Women in Factories program, the topics that it addresses, as well as the practical details of the program. I show that the approach to 'empowerment' that is put across by the Women in Factories program is closely aligned to what Sardenberg (2008) has called 'liberal empowerment', given its strong focus on teaching individuals technical solutions for problems with structural origins, and its emphasis on improved worker performance. A comparison with two other empowerment programs for women garment workers which have been set up by NGOs shows that these programs are consciously addressing the structural inequalities inherent to the garment industry, and as such, that they are more likely to engender 'liberating empowerment' (Sardenberg 2008).

In Chapter 6, I turn to the everyday experiences of the women who participated in the Women in Factories program, examining how their gender, as well as their socio-economic status and age, have affected the range of choices that they could make in their lives. I argue that these different identity markers or 'systems of oppression' intersect to create a 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins 1990). Observations from the women's workplaces and homes illustrate how gender continues to determine divisions of labor among employees and family members alike - at work, the supervisor and managerial levels do not reflect the gender ratio of the garment workforce, and at home, women are expected to take on most responsibility for the household tasks that make up the 'second shift' (Hochschild and Machung 1990). Essentialist notions of gender (Agnew 2003) turn out to be persistent in the way the respondents make sense of these gendered divisions of labor.

The final empirical chapter, Chapter 7, shows how the women respondents reflect on the gender norms that they are faced with, and how they envision the future of their careers and their family lives. Many respondents feel that there should be more equality between men and women at home, which can be seen as a form of 'power from within' (Calvès 2009). However, most do not anticipate significant changes in their workplace. The chapter shows that the factories' hiring practices may keep women from advancing to positions with more responsibilities in the workplace. In other words, their 'power to' is limited. The women respondents are mostly defining their dreams for the future in terms of their kids. In this chapter, too, essentialist notions of gender underlie the way the women workers and their superiors reflect on opportunities for men and women.

In Chapter 8, the conclusion, I consider the implications of the research findings for understanding agency as it is conceptualized and created by different approaches to empowerment. I also consider the meaning of internalized gender stereotypes, which can be understood as an element of a patriarchal hegemony (Liddy 1995), for gender performativity. Based on the findings on this liberal empowerment initiative, I conclude that there is a potential for major brands and retailers to contribute to more structural change for the women workers in their supply chain and the 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins 1990) that they are dealing with.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is informed and inspired by theories from the domain of development studies, feminist studies, and intersections between these two research domains. I will outline how concepts like 'gender' and 'empowerment', which have been elaborately debated by feminist scholars, have become part of development discourses. In feminist scholarship, concepts like 'empowerment' are given a normative meaning; the goal is not only to pose positive questions about how things are, but also to engage in a normative debate on how things should be. Mahmood (2006, 39) observed that "freedom is normative to feminism: critical scrutiny is applied to those who want to limit women's freedom rather than those who want to extend it". As has been argued by various feminist scholars, however, the inclusion of the researchers' norms, values and assumptions in the building of theories is not unique to feminist studies. Blau (1981, 540) argued that "[f]ew [scholars] are neutral - it is not a question of feminist versus "objective" scholarship." She emphasized the importance of clarity around the researchers' values so as to contribute to a better understanding of the environment in which the "quest for truth" takes place. Following this, I trust that, by contextualizing and defining my theoretical framework, I am transparent about the values that matter to me as a researcher.

The chapter is structured as follows. I will first go into the concept of gender. Then, I will discuss three approaches that have connected issues of gender inequality to international development thinking, namely Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD). The GAD approach has been important for the dissemination of the concept of 'empowerment' among development institutions. The last part of this section will be dedicated to a discussion of empowerment and how it has been interpreted by different actors. The concept of empowerment is central to my analysis of the Women in Factories program.

### 2.2 GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY AT HOME AND IN THE WORKPLACE

While debates about social divisions between men and women can be traced back to the first wave of feminist activism around the beginning of the twentieth century, the concept of 'gender' with its current meaning was not introduced into feminist theory until the 1970s (Rahman and Jackson, 2010). The concept arose from criticism of the determinism attached to the more fixed concept of 'sex' (Scott 1986). While sex refers to biological differences between female and male bodies (differences in chromosomes, reproductive organs, external and internal genitals, hormonal states and secondary sex characteristics), gender is

about "socially constructed differences between men and women and the beliefs and identities that support difference and inequality" (Acker 2006, 444). Many societies prescribe a strong division between acceptable behavior for men and for women, but this is a social construct; what it means to act 'feminine' or 'masculine' can, and does, differ across time and place. Butler (1988, 527) has therefore characterized gender reality as 'performative', meaning that "it is real only to the extent that it is performed." In other words, in order for gender norms to remain intact requires individuals to continuously perform their gender according to these norms. "[P]erforming [one's gender] well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all" (Ibid., 528). Butler's remark on "essentialism of gender identity" refers to a static conceptualization of femininity and masculinity. Concepts such as the 'women's way of knowing' that some French feminists have used to describe a unique female mode of discourse arise from an essentialist understanding of gender (Agnew 2003).

In order to sustain the socially accepted characteristics of masculinity and femininity in a society, expectations of masculine and feminine behaviour are constantly reproduced and passed onto the next generation. In the process of this reproduction, the norms can change. Butler acknowledged that, although everyone is aware of the gender norms they are expected to adhere to, individuals can also perform their gender 'wrong'. We are discouraged from doing this, because "performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments" from the people around us (Butler 1988, 528). However, a 'wrong' reproduction of gender norms can also cause these norms to be 'undone' or 'redone' (Butler 2009) so that the behavior that was initially considered wrong becomes more acceptable. Butler's perspective on the power of gender norms, i.e., that these norms need to be reproduced in order to be sustained, and that the reproduction itself can bring about unexpected effects, recalls the theory of hegemony, in which power is not stable, but needs to be reproduced constantly. (Butler 2000).

Gender is far from the only identity that affects interactions between individuals. To understand this, we need the concept of intersectionality, which I will now introduce.

As each person's identity is composed of a unique combination of different identity markers, it would be naïve to expect all women to experience something in the same way, simply because they have the same gender. Black feminists called for an approach that would take into account the intersections of the different identity markers. Hill Collins (1990) argued that race and class should be seen as additional 'systems of oppression', that interlock with gender to form a 'matrix of domination'. Thus, while they may both be oppressed by men, white middle-class women do not experience oppression in the same way that black lower-class women do in the United States, because of their white and class privilege. Age, religion, socio-economic background and sexual orientations are just a few other identity markers that matter. To take into account how these different markers intersect with each other to

produce different outcomes for each individual, feminists have argued for an intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1989; Yuval-Davis 2006). While the concept first gained popularity in the United States, it has been adapted to national contexts around the world.

In Indian scholarship, caste and religion are two systems of oppression that have received more attention in comparison to the United States (Purkayastha et al. 2003). According to Menon (2009, 95), the politics of caste calls into question the “assumed commonality of female experience”. For example, there are some 98 million Dalit women in India who face discrimination based both on their gender and their caste (Mangubhai and Capraro 2015). On the other hand, in some cases “the effect of caste is moderated by gender” or the other way around (Gandhi 2017). As my research shows, different identity markers besides gender affect the opportunities of women garment workers. To talk about ‘women workers’ as a homogenous group obscures the differences within this group that can explain differences in their experiences at work and in their private lives.

Gender involves power. In a patriarchal society, the majority of positions of power are occupied by men (Sandole-Staroste 2013; Beechey 1979). While feminist scholars initially focused on the family and home life as the main sphere where women’s subordination was reproduced (e.g. Millett 1969), more contemporary authors have shown that patriarchal mechanisms are equally salient in other spheres. Walby (1990) argues that Great Britain has seen a shift from private patriarchy to public patriarchy. In private patriarchy, women were confined to the private sphere, where they were oppressed by their husband and/or other male family members. In this type of patriarchy, ‘a woman’s place was in the home’. In a situation of public patriarchy, on the other hand, women are free to access both the public and private sphere, but they are subordinated within the public arenas. Their subordination has become more collective and structural. For work, this means that while women used to be excluded from paid work, in a public patriarchy they are mostly confined to lower-paid jobs (Ibid.). While Walby estimated that her analysis of patriarchy would not necessarily apply outside of Britain and other western societies, her concept of public patriarchy has been adopted by Indian scholars as well, who have observed the same phenomenon in their own country (e.g. Dasgupta and Gokulsing 2013; Deka 2013).

hooks (2000) has criticized the depiction of the patriarchal household as a universal site of women’s oppression. First, poor and working-class women (and, in the U.S., Afro-American women) never had the ‘freedom’ to decide not to work; they simply had to contribute to the family income. Second, hooks has pointed out that the family life represents a main point of solidarity for black communities, in which men and women work together. She therefore called the homeplace a site of resistance (hooks 1990). Thus, in her view, black working class women did not experience the private patriarchy in the way that Walby described. What hooks and Walby do agree on, however, is that work does not liberate women from male domination.



## THE REPRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Turning to the workplace, Acker (2006) has theorized how oppression is reproduced there. She argues that class, gender, and racial relations of inequality are reproduced in organisations through 'inequality regimes', which consist of loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that are combined to maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities in an organisation. Job requirements, recruitment and hiring practices (e.g. whether people are hired through the 'old boy network'), and informal interactions at work (e.g. the extent to which people can make themselves heard in meetings, who is invited for drinks after work, but also instances of sexual harassment) all determine to what extent inequalities are reproduced in an organisation.

To explain how job requirements keep gender inequalities in place, Acker introduced the concept of the 'disembodied worker' to describe an abstract, ideal worker, "who only exists for the work" (Acker 1990, 149). She argued that the male worker who is fully focused on his full-time job, while someone else (usually a woman) takes care of his personal needs and his children, comes closest to a real version of the disembodied worker. It is much more difficult for women to match these expectations, since they face a 'second shift' of responsibilities at home that they are expected to manage (Hochschild and Machung 1990). Sutherland (2010) has observed that, even as men become more involved in tasks that are part of this second shift, like household tasks and child rearing, women often remain in charge of the 'mental load': keeping track of all the tasks that need to be done at home (Ehrensaft 1983 as cited in Sutherland 2010).

The inequality regimes that are at work in hierarchical organizations do not imply that men are the ideal workers for all jobs, however. Acker (2006) notes that the ideal worker for many jobs is a woman, especially if her employers believe she is compliant and will accept orders and low wages. This is in line with the 'public patriarchy' described by Walby (1990), i.e., a society in which women are allowed to work but are systematically assigned the jobs at the bottom of the career ladder. Furthermore, Acker specified that the ideal, compliant woman worker "is often a woman of color; immigrant women are sometimes even more desirable" (Acker 2006, 450). Acker's specification about women of colour and immigrant women illustrates the relevance of intersectionality for the workplace. Her example also shows that essentialist, stereotypical expectations of gender have real consequences for the kinds of jobs that different people are given access to.

The notion that men have a privileged position in many societies around the world has been taken up by development studies and international development practice. In the remainder of this chapter, I will retrace how different approaches to women and gender in development

have evolved and how the concept of 'empowerment' came to be co-opted in the mainstream development discourse.

## **2.3 WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT, WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT: ENTERING WOMEN INTO THE DEVELOPMENT EQUATION**

The first approach to including issues of gender inequality in development practice was the 'women in development' (WID) approach. My discussion of this approach is largely based on Razavi and Miller (1995) who discuss the origins, impact and shortcomings of this approach in great detail. The Women in Development (WID) approach was introduced in the early 1970s by female development professionals in Washington. They challenged the 'trickle down' theories of development, which assumed that "economic development in the public, largely elite male sphere, would naturally 'trickle down' to women in the private sphere" (Chowdhry 2003). In their overseas experiences, the professionals had seen that modernization efforts had different impacts on men and women, and could even deteriorate the position of women. Lobbying from U.S. women's circles led to an amendment to the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act in 1973. The Percy Amendment required U.S. assistance to help "integrate women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development effort" (Tinker 1990).

While WID put the topic of women's subordination on the development agenda, it did not challenge the power structures underlying their subordination. Instead, women's subordination was interpreted through an economic framework. WID argued that acknowledging women's role as productive members of society, and bringing them into the productive sphere, would allow them to improve their status vis-à-vis men. With this frame, WID challenged the framing of post-war development agencies and NGOs of third world women only as 'wives' and 'mothers'. The WID discourse gave rise to a variety of 'women's projects' that were aimed at improving women's productivity, in order to bring about higher economic returns. This made it easier to 'sell WID' to development agencies, who were more receptive to arguments for targeting women that linked up women's progress to mainstream development concerns. So, rather than asking development agencies to help women, WID advocates showed that women's advancement could serve as an instrument to produce 'development' in a more general sense. (Razavi and Miller 1995)

The fact that the WID approach focused solely on women and their economic productivity quickly led it to be criticized by a number of development practitioners, who argued that the approach was too narrow. Marxist feminist research on topics such as women in the informal economy and the role of women in the international division of labour contributed to an understanding that women's subordination was not only caused by men, but also had to do with (neo-)colonial oppression and social inequality based on other identity markers than gender, such as race, class and socio-economic status (Pandy, Watson, and Makan 1997). The

development interventions associated with this Women and Development (WAD) approach, which emerged in the late 1970s, were focused on women's equitable participation (Pittman 2014). Some proponents of the WAD approach have focused on increasing women's participation in mainstream development programmes and in women's participation in social, economic, political and legal structures. On the other hand, some NGOs worked on women-focused organising, helping women to set up autonomous institutions. The choice between 'integration' (of women into mainstream institutions) and 'autonomy' (of women's separate institutions) was an important debate within the WAD paradigm (Connelly et al. 2000). However, like the WID scholars, neither side of the debate looked for a way to challenge the gender roles and norms that sustained gender and other inequalities in the mainstream institutions. (Pittman 2014). As Rathgeber (1989, 10) summarized: "the under-representation of women in economic, political and social structures still is identified [by the WAD perspective] primarily as a problem which can be solved by carefully designed intervention strategies rather than by more fundamental shifts in the social relations of gender."

## **2.4 GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT AND THE INTRODUCTION OF EMPOWERMENT**

The attention from feminist academia for the social construction of gender identity, and the power differentials that reinforced this construction, would give rise to a third development approach, that aimed to address power and the patriarchy.

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach "attempts to understand why and how women have been systematically assigned to inferior and secondary roles" (Plewes and Stuart 1991, 126). It called for more radical societal transformations than the WID and WAD approaches. Rather than trying to fit GAD into existing development strategies, advocates of the GAD approach pushed for restructuring of these strategies as well (Jones and Perry 2003). As power was key for understanding the marginalised position of women in the GAD approach, the concept of empowerment was introduced to frame possible solutions. A publication from two DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) activists, Gita Sen and Caren Grown, in 1987 called for new approaches to development, and a radical transformation of the economic, political, legal, and social structures that perpetuated gender, race and class dominations. The new approach they promoted would be labelled the 'empowerment approach' (Calvès 2009). Empowerment is one of the concepts that gained mainstream attention thanks to GAD, and is central to this research. Therefore, the next section investigates the concept of empowerment, its adaption by development actors, and the different meanings that have become attached to it.

## **2.5 (MIS)UNDERSTANDING 'EMPOWERMENT'**

The definition of women's empowerment that I will work with was developed by Keller and Mbwewe. They defined women's empowerment as "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination" (Keller and Mbwewe 1991 as cited in Rowlands 1995, 104). This definition includes a collective aspect ('organize'), and explicitly mentions the elimination of women's subordination as a goal of empowerment. As I will show in this section, different development actors have interpreted empowerment in different ways, which has led to scepticism from some scholars who argue that the concept has been 'taken hostage' by development agencies (Calvès 2009).

### **2.5.1 A POPULAR GOAL**

The GAD language, and the concept of 'empowerment', gained more traction in the mainstream development discourse thanks to advocacy from well-organized women's rights and feminist activists (Calvès 2009). Thus, academic debates about GAD have impacted development policy and practice, through an ongoing dialogue with academics, policy makers and practitioners. In the International Conference on Population and Development, organised by the UN in 1994, delegates agreed that women's equality and empowerment was a global priority (Pittman 2014). The commitment of governments was reinforced when they signed the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, which was the outcome of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. The Platform stated that "empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples" (UN Women n.d.). Subsequently, the concept was picked up by many bilateral and international development agencies and organizations, who incorporated it into their policies and discourses (Calvès 2009). To 'promote gender equality and empower women' was also the third of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (Millennium Project 2006).

At the same time, a movement towards neoliberal restructuring had been growing from the 1980s onwards. Prügl and True (2014) observe a 'reversal of roles' between corporations and states. As the influence of mandatory state regulation became smaller, corporations have started to behave more like states, "building corporate patriotism, emphasizing 'soft issues' such as their value to society, cases such as poverty eradication, labor standards, environmental sustainability, gender equality, and delivering welfare services" (Ibid., 1138). Meanwhile, states have become more focused on their 'efficiency', using more language from the business world and moving towards more and more privatisation of state welfare services. This environment also brought about new public-private partnerships, with a wide variety in scope and required commitment from their public and private participants. Gender equality and empowerment are popular themes in these partnerships (Prügl and True 2014).

Sharp et al. (2003) argue that part of the reason why empowerment has become a popular goal among many development actors is the 'vagueness' of the concept. "Common sense insists [empowerment] is a good thing, but quite what the term 'empowerment' means, or how it is achieved, is more complex and contested" (Sharp et al. 2003, 282). This vagueness can be traced back to different understandings of 'power'. Feminist scholars have emphasized that the power in empowerment should not be understood as 'power over', which implies that one group gains power at the expense of another group. They called this 'power of domination' (Calvès 2009). Scholars like Rowlands and Kabeer favour the understanding of power as 'power with', 'power to', and 'power from within' (Ibid.) First, 'power with' refers to "a collective political power used by grassroots organizations" (Calvès 2009). 'Power to' implies the ability to act in certain ways and accomplish something, "despite possible opposition" (Kabeer 1999 as cited in Sardenberg 2008). Power to in this sense can be seen as agency. 'Power from within' links up to an understanding of empowerment in which women are encouraged to rethink self-perceptions and understandings of gender relations, and that they come to think of themselves as capable agents of change (Sharp et al. 2003). Calvès (2009, 10) has referred to this kind of power as "self-confidence and the capacity to undo the effects of internalized oppression".

Kabeer (2005, 14) explained that "[b]ecause of the significance of beliefs and values in legitimating inequality, a process of empowerment often begins from within. It encompasses not only 'decision making' and other forms of observable action but also the meaning, motivation, and purpose that individuals bring to their actions; that is, their *sense* of agency." In summary, if 'power to' is about the agency that an individual has, 'power from within' can be understood as that person's perception of her agency. Kabeer (Ibid.) further contributed to the understanding of agency by introducing a distinction between 'passive' forms of agency and 'active' forms of agency. Passive agency refers to action taken "when there is little choice", whereas active agency is "purposeful behavior".

### **2.5.2 LIBERATING OR LIBERAL EMPOWERMENT?**

While the wide variety of interpretations of empowerment may have contributed to its popularity among many development actors, it has also led to criticism. From the perspective of feminist scholars, many development projects that have been set up 'under the guise of empowerment' are not contributing to true empowerment as they would define it. In order to contextualize the different interpretations of empowerment, I use the dichotomy defined by Sardenberg (2008), who distinguishes 'liberating empowerment' and 'liberal empowerment'. Sardenberg uses a definition from Ferguson to describe 'liberating empowerment': "the increased material and personal power that comes about when groups of people organize themselves to challenge the status quo through some kind of self-organization of the group" (Ferguson 2004 as cited in Sardenberg 2008, 20). According to Sardenberg, power relations are a central issue in liberating empowerment, and women's empowerment in this understanding aims to "question, destabilise and, eventually, transform the gender order of patriarchal domination" (Sardenberg 2008, 19). Both collective action

and empowerment of women at a personal level are part of this process. This 'liberating' type of empowerment clearly corresponds with the definition of empowerment I cited in the beginning of this section.

Liberal empowerment, on the other hand, focuses on the individual, arguing that teaching women technical and instrumental skills will empower them, leaving politics out of the equation (Sardenberg 2008). According to Nazneen, Darkwah, and Sultan (2014), feminist scholars working on gender and development have taken a critical stance towards this individualized empowerment that does not aim to challenge power structures. They argue that empowerment requires group solidarity. Thus, although the concept originated from the 'Gender and Development' approach that paid great attention to power structures, liberal empowerment has been 'watered down' so that it can be aligned with existing structures.

This more conservative approach to empowerment, which does not challenge the status quo, has nevertheless gained popularity among major western institutions and companies. According to Hickel (2014), mainstream development institutions and companies use the concept of empowerment to shift the attention away from structural drivers of poverty, such as structural adjustment policies, labour exploitation and financial crises. Instead, women and girls are encouraged to focus on improving themselves, and becoming 'empowered'. In this individual conceptualization of empowerment, "[w]omen and girls are made to bear the responsibility for bootstrapping themselves out of poverty that is caused in part by the very institutions that purport to save them." (Hickel 2014, 1356).

Furthermore, the justification for women's empowerment is often based on instrumentalist arguments, although the recognition of its intrinsic value is growing (Nazneen, Darkwah, and Sultan 2014). This instrumentalist focus was a clear characteristic of the WID approach, in which women's participation in interventions was framed as a means to other 'mainstream development' ends like poverty eradication. Liberal empowerment as defined by Sardenberg (2008) also regards empowerment as an instrument.

A third observation from Nazneen, Darkwah, and Sultan (2014) on present-day empowerment is that there are multiple understandings and meanings of women's empowerment, which are contextual, and that the concept has multiple dimensions. So, while there are some broad agreements about what empowerment should not be, feminist scholars do not assume that there is only one true meaning of empowerment. The involvement of western actors, such as garment brands and NGOs, in empowerment 'interventions', has been contested, as the agency of the women that they target is not always sufficiently acknowledged. Siddiqi (2009) has criticized narratives that position the western consumer or garment brand as the 'saviour', responsible for rescuing women in the third world, who are constructed as passive and helpless. White, western feminism has been similarly criticized for its implicit assumption that all women have the same needs and



ambitions, and that third-world women need western feminists to rescue them (Hirschmann 1998). This perspective does not imply the 'power to' and 'power from within' that more critical feminist scholars have called for.

Another pitfall for development interventions that are set up for women's empowerment is observed by Menon (2009) and Ruwanpura and Hughes (2016). The authors looked critically at two development interventions that targeted women because of their 'feminine' qualities. These interventions are based on an essentialist conceptualization of gender, as I explained earlier in my discussion of gender and intersectionality. An essentialist understanding of women as inherently more altruistic, disciplined and caring is problematic, as these 'qualities' assigned to women "may stem from social tension and everyday violence that shape domestic social relations, which are hardly empowering for women's identity and subjectivity." (Ruwanpura and Hughes 2016, 1280). Once again, this interpretation of empowerment does not fit in the GAD approach, as it is based on stereotypes that are supporting patriarchal structures, and therefore helps to keep these structures in place.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

In short, the theoretical framework around my research is inspired by development studies and feminist scholarship. My understanding of gender is non-essentialist: like many contemporary feminists, I understand gender as a social construct. Therefore, gender roles can be challenged and changed, which is an important starting point for my research. Gender has real consequences for our everyday interactions – we're always performing gender and are held accountable by others to the societal gender norms. For many societies around the world, this means that women are structurally subordinated. Furthermore, gender intersects with other identity markers or 'systems of oppression', to create a variety of individual experiences. For India, identities like caste, religion, ethnicity are important systems of oppression that intersect with gender. Gender and other inequalities are supported by underlying power structures. In the workplace, these inequalities are reproduced in what Acker (2006) has called 'inequality regimes'. Stereotypical expectations about male and female workers, but also about, for example, migrant workers, affect the job opportunities that are accessible to different people. Acker's theory informs my analysis of gendered divisions of labor.

In the world of development studies and development practice, it wasn't until the 1970s that female development professionals started to call the assumption of 'trickle-down' development into question. Their own experiences had shown that development interventions impacted men and women differently, sometimes to the detriment of women. A series of attempts to make development interventions sensitive to the issue of women's subordination can be grouped into three different waves. The latest wave has been labelled 'Gender and Development'. This approach called for attention to the power structures that underlie gender inequality, and introduced the concept of women's empowerment into

mainstream development discourse. Many different actors have shown their enthusiasm for contributing to 'empowerment', which means that a wide variety of people around the world are confronted with 'empowerment interventions'. However, in the eyes of feminist scholars, empowerment has been misunderstood by many development actors, or even 'taken hostage'.

To truly challenge the power structures underlying gender inequalities, empowerment should be "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination" (Keller and Mbewewe 1991 as cited in Rowlands 1995, 104). In order for an empowerment initiative to be liberating rather than liberal (Sardenberg 2008), there should be critical engagement with existing power relations underlying structures of domination, on a personal and a collective level. In my examination of the Women in Factories program, I have used Sardenberg's distinction between the liberating and liberal types of empowerment as a tool for analysis.

## 3. Context

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I give an overview of the context in which this research should be understood. First, I describe the importance of the garment industry for India and the region around Bangalore. I also highlight some key concerns around labor conditions in the garment industry. Then I go into the issue of gender-based discrimination in India. Finally, I outline the efforts made by several major garment retailers to make their business more socially responsible, paying special attention to programs that they have set up in collaboration with NGOs.

### 3.2 THE INDIAN, BANGALOREAN AND GLOBAL GARMENT INDUSTRY

The textiles and garments industry is an important sector for India's national economy. Textiles and garments together accounted for 13,6% of the country's total export revenue in 2014 (OEC 2017). The sector, and employment opportunity in the sector, are expected to keep growing, as a consequence of increased domestic demand, exports, and government incentives (Knitting Industry 2017). India's textiles and garment production is significant for the world market: India is one of the world's largest producers of cotton, and among the top garment exporters (Make In India n.d.; Mirdha 2016). The textile industry as a whole employs about 45 million people, while some 13 million work in the apparel sector (IBEF 2018; Arora 2017). The majority of textiles and garment workers are women (Sisters for Change 2016). According to the ILO (2015), the largest readymade garment manufacturing centers can be found in Bangalore (in the state of Karnataka), Tirupur and Chennai (in Tamil Nadu) and the National Capital Region (the metropolitan area that includes New Delhi).

Part of the reason for India's success as a garment producer lies in its low wages. The average minimum wage in key garment producing regions is far below what the Asia Floor Wage campaign would consider to be a 'living wage' for Indian garment workers (Asia Floor Wage 2017). A living wage, according to the Asia Floor Wage, should be sufficient for workers to cover their own basic needs and those of the family members they are supporting economically (Ibid.).

This research focuses on the garment production taking place in and around the city of Bangalore, in Karnataka. Bangalore, officially named Bengaluru, is India's fifth-most populous urban agglomeration, with over 10 million residents in 2017 (Harish 2017). Information technology (IT) is the city's core business: of the \$150 billion in revenue contributed by the sector nationally, \$45 billion came from Bangalore in 2014. An expected 2 million Bangalore residents will live in the city by 2020 (Ibid.). The garment industry is another important source

of employment for Bangalore. According to Bangalore-based Garment Labour Union, around eight hundred thousand garment workers are working in the state of Karnataka, 85% of whom are women. Garment factories in the city of Bangalore employ over half a million women (GLU 2018). The city's garment industry attracts many migrants from nearby villages and tribal hamlets (The Hindu 2012).

There are several concerns regarding labor conditions in the garment sector. A combination of low wages and high pressure from buying companies to deliver orders in time leads workers to work long hours, either because they want to or because they have to. Due to the pressure on factories to keep their prices competitive (i.e. low), worker safety is compromised. Furthermore, women face additional risks of being sexually harassed by their managers, most of whom are men (Sisters for Change 2016). In addition to gender, other potential sources of workplace discrimination in India include identity markers like caste, indigeneity, ethnicity and religion (FIDH 2014). As I explained in the section on my theoretical framework, these identity markers intersect with each other, meaning that women from a minority ethnicity are likely among the most vulnerable in the workplace.

Incidents like the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, have made consumers and brands acutely aware of the deadly consequences of unsafe factories for garment workers (Al-Mahmood 2013). It gave rise to campaigns like the Fashion Revolution day, which encourages consumers to question the policies and practices of their favourite garment brands (Fashion Revolution 2017). While globalisation has removed the consumer far from the people that made his/her products, and commodities have become 'fetishized', i.e. the value of the labour that went into making them is hidden from view (Felluga 2011), there has been renewed interest in the story behind the clothes sold to western consumers. I will return to this topic to consider the response from garment retailers, after a discussion on gender in India.

### **3.3 GENDER IN INDIA**

The risk of gender-based violence in the workplace faced by women reflects social structures in the Indian society as a whole, where women are consistently discriminated against in a wide variety of domains. For many women in India, the home is not a safe place. A survey conducted by Priya et al. (2014) among men and women in seven states across India showed that 52% of the women stated that they had experienced some form of violence in their lifetime, and 60% of men said that they had acted violently against their wife/partner at some point in their lives.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) keeps track of the worldwide progress with respect to different dimensions of human development, including gender (in)equality. Their Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures inequality in three domains: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status. The GII data show that India is still far removed

from gender equality. For example, 56,6% of men aged 25 years and older had at least some secondary education, compared to only 27% of women (UNDP 2015a). Additional numbers from the UNDP's 2015 Human Development Report show that, while overall literacy is increasing in India, the youth literacy rate (people aged 15-24) for women (74,4%) is still lower than for men (88,4%). Furthermore, women's estimated gross national income per capita in 2014 was less than 25% of the estimate for men (UNDP 2015b). This indicates that it is very difficult for women to be economically independent.

Underlying these statistics is the normalized notion that men's dominance over women is normal. As boys and girls grow up, they are socialized into India's gender norms; women are expected to behave submissively, while men are expected to exercise power (Priya et al. 2014). Parents prefer to have a son over a daughter, which also translates into a sex ratio at birth that is lower than biologically normal. While it is biologically normal that 943 to 980 girls are born per 1000 baby boys (Liisanantti and Beese 2012), the sex ratio at birth in India was 919 girls per 1000 boys in 2015-16 (The Huffington Post 2017). This shows that sex selection, and accompanying practices like femicide, are still ongoing in the country (Liisanantti and Beese 2012).<sup>1</sup> A government report estimated that some 63 million women are statistically 'missing' from the Indian population as a consequence of a range of practices that favor boys over girls (DW News 2018).

The extent to which these practices take place differs among states. As Banerji (2016) explains, wealthier and better educated states have a lower sex ratio at birth (i.e., less girls per 1000 boys). Wealthier families are more likely to view daughters as a threat to retaining their wealth, as a well-educated daughter from a wealthy family is expected to bring a substantive dowry into her marriage. Dowry, the payment of cash or provision of gifts by the bride's family to the groom's family, has been prohibited by law since 1961, but continues to be a widespread practice (Jeyaseelan 2015). According to Banerji (2016), poor families are more likely to consider daughters as assets, who can be put to work in the household, or as field or factory workers for additional family income. This illustrates how caste and class identity intersect with gender to create different outcomes for girls in India.

### **3.4 CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The calls for better monitoring of working conditions and more transparency in the garment industry have led some major fashion brands and retailers to communicate more openly about their corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and the factories they source their products from. Major garment retailers, including C&A, H&M, Walmart, Gap, and Marks & Spencer, now report on their CSR progress regularly. They detail their efforts in improving

---

<sup>1</sup> Menon (2015) has warned against putting too much emphasis on 'fixing' India's skewed sex ratios, which has been used as a legitimization for policing women's access to legal and safe abortions. Instead, she argued, the underlying devaluing of women's lives should be tackled.

sustainability, working conditions, and auditing and reporting. Many brands are also involved in partnerships with NGOs, and have set up projects to improve the workers' lives outside the factory.

Several brands have set up their own foundations. C&A "is committed to improving the situation of women worldwide—in our own company, in our supply network, and in communities around the world" and has launched an 'Inspiring Women' campaign with its C&A Foundation (C&A 2016). H&M set up the H&M Foundation, as "we believe it is crucial to contribute positively to the communities along our value chain. It is important to us that we drive lasting change and that these communities benefit from having us there." (H&M 2016). The Walmart Foundation, set up by the biggest retail chain in the world, which also owns a range of apparel house brands, aims to "[give] people access to a better life (...) one community at a time." (Walmart Foundation 2018) Other brands, including Gap Inc. and Marks & Spencer, set up community programs. Gap's Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement (P.A.C.E.) programme was set up to "teach the women who make our clothes critical skills for navigating life both at work and at home" (Gap Inc. 2015a). Marks & Spencer's Global Community Programme supports "social and environmental initiatives to strengthen the resilience of communities and security of supply by 2020." (Marks & Spencer 2016). And these are just a few examples.

'Empowerment' is a recurring concept in the discussions around these brand-sponsored community programmes. The concept is often used to refer to women. The executive director of Gap's P.A.C.E. program said that the program's curriculum for young girls and women "will give girls the skills, confidence and technical abilities they need to change the trajectory of their lives and empower women to lead their communities. We believe in advancing women to advance the world." (Gap Inc. 2015b). As I showed in chapter X on the theoretical framework, the adaptation of the concept of women's empowerment into mainstream development and corporate discourse has raised questions about the current value and relevance of the concept.

In this research, I explore the meaning of brand-sponsored empowerment efforts for the women that they target. This chapter described the context that the women participants find themselves in. They are employed in a sector that has received criticism on a range of several pressing issues regarding labor conditions. On their workplace and outside of it, the women face gender-based discrimination, which is reinforced by patriarchal norms and practices that are widespread in the Indian society. This research examines the extent to which Walmart's Women in Factories program tackles these structural issues and encourages the women participants to imagine a different future for themselves. Furthermore, the findings illustrate the impact of a business, or 'liberal' (Sardenberg 2008) approach to empowerment on the program's contents. In the following chapter, I will elaborate on the methodology that I have used to achieve this.



## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will give an overview of the methodological choices I made in my research and reflect on the implications of these choices for the data I was able to collect. First, I will describe how I ended up working with the the NGO Swasti for this research. I will then show how I selected my research participants and outline key characteristics of my sample of research respondents. I will also describe the informants I interviewed to gather additional information. Then, I will go into the research tools I used, and the kind of information I gathered using those tools. I will follow this up with a reflection on my position as a western researcher aligned with an NGO, considering how it has affected my interactions with respondents and informants.

#### 4.2.1 ESTABLISHING AND APPROACHING 'THE FIELD'

For this research I got in touch with women garment workers in India who had participated in a brand-sponsored empowerment program. Since it would be relatively difficult to find these women independently, I decided to work together with a brand or NGO that was implementing an empowerment program. This collaboration also allowed me to get more insight into the contents and goals of the program, and therefore helped to contextualize the experiences of the women participants. From reading information in CSR reports and websites about brand-sponsored empowerment programs, I noticed that the NGO Swasti was an important partner involved in the implementation of several empowerment programs in India. For example, Swasti has been involved in the HERproject, Gap Inc's P.A.C.E. program, and Walmart's Women in Factories program. (HERproject 2017; Gap Inc. 2017; Walmart 2015). Swasti is a health resource center that wants to achieve 'a world of healthy people', implementing health initiatives for marginalized communities, including sex workers, LGBT people, the rural and urban poor, and women workers (Swasti 2017b). The NGO has its headquarters in Bangalore, and also operates in New Delhi, Tirupur and Chickballapur.

Swasti's collaborations with empowerment initiatives like the HERproject and Women in Factories are executed by the organisation's 'Life Skills For All' team. The members of this team regularly visit factories and neighborhoods in South India to facilitate activities (including training sessions and community outreach activities) that are part of the empowerment initiatives, and report the results of these activities back to the initiatives' donors.

I reached out to Swasti to ask whether they saw possibilities to take me on as an intern and researcher. There was interest from Swasti's life skills team in the longevity of the effects from the Women in Factories program, and we agreed that I would take this into account in my research project, focusing on women who had participated in the Women in Factories program during the program's first phase, and creating an internal report for Swasti that

would focus on the program's long-term impact. Swasti supplied me with relevant documents to obtain a visa and arranged my access to the factories where I met my research respondents. I will discuss the implications of my 'dual' position as an intern and researcher in a later section of this chapter. First, I will go on to discuss my research participants.

#### **4.2.2 SELECTING THE FACTORIES**

Since the women I wanted to interview are working six days a week, eight hours a day, it was easiest to try and visit them at their factories during working hours. Moreover, I wanted to see the women's workplaces for myself to learn more about the gendered divisions of labor inside the factories, and to observe interactions between employees. The first phase of the Women in Factories program, which was the focus of my study, included fifteen factories in India. Twelve of these were garment factories. I conducted interviews with women participants in three different garment factories, to get a sense of the variety in workplace environments and the way in which the women's experiences might be influenced by the location of the factory (i.e. in an urban or more rural setting). I selected these three factories in consultation with coordinators from Swasti, who advised me to select locations that were easily accessible from Bangalore (where I was based) to save time and money. Swasti arranged access to the three factories and set up the dates of my visits. A Kannada interpreter accompanied me to the first two factories while a Tamil interpreter was with me in the third factory. I will reflect on the implications of working with the interpreters later in this chapter.

The three factories that I visited were large export-oriented factories supplying to major western garment brands. I will now give a brief description of each factory.

Factory 1 is located in a rural area about 50 kilometres from Bangalore. It is a large export-oriented factory, one of several units that are owned by the same production company. The factory unit is an enormous hall, with all of the production batches on the ground floor, and offices and conference rooms on the first floor, from which one can oversee the entire production line. Since the area around the factory site is not very densely populated, the factory has arranged vans for work-home transportation. I visited this factory on two consecutive days.

Factory 2 is located in an industrial area of the city of Bangalore, where a number of different garment factories are located. Production takes place in a building with four to five floors. Meeting rooms and offices are located on ground floor level. Like Factory 1, this factory is also part of a larger production company, and this location doubles as the company's headquarters. In addition to the production facility, there is also a separate training room on the premises with a canteen for higher management on top. At the end of each working day, as the workers leave the factory, street vendors gather around the factory entrance to sell their snacks and vegetables to the workers. This factory offers workers a van facility, although many can also access the factory using public transportation. I visited this factory on two

consecutive days to conduct interviews with women workers, and returned a few weeks later to conduct an interview with an HR representative.

Factory 3 is located in an industrial area near a town some 50 kilometres away from Bangalore. It resembles Factory 1 in that its production lines are all on the ground floor, with a conference room and offices on the first floor. Like Factory 1, the factory also has a van facility to pick up workers coming from surrounding villages. I visited this factory one time.

#### **4.2.3 SELECTING THE RESPONDENTS**

I have interviewed fourteen women workers. In two of the factories, I interviewed six women (both spread out over two visits on consecutive days), and in one factory I interviewed two women. Due to financial and time limits, I was not able to revisit this factory. I selected my respondents using a nonprobability sample, which is appropriate in a labor-intensive, in-depth study (Bernard 2011). I set out to interview a group of women that was highly diverse in several aspects: age, education level, occupation and marital status. Furthermore, since the Women in Factories program consists of two parts (foundational and advanced) I wanted to reflect this in my sample, so that half of the women I interviewed had completed the foundational training and the other half had done the advanced training as well.

While the initial plan was to select the respondents before the factory visits, using attendance lists that Swasti had kept at the time of the trainings, it turned out that many of the women had left the factory since participating in the Women in Factories program. This is due to the high labor turnover rate in Bangalore. As a result, some of the respondents were selected by factory management on the spot. Of course, this can be problematic, as the management would likely select the respondents whom they expect to be most enthusiastic about their workplace and the Women in Factories program. On the other hand, even the women I had selected beforehand could have been given instructions about the kind of responses they should give me. Indeed, one respondent whom I had included in my selection told me that she was expected to say only positive things.

It should also be noted that there is an inherent bias in the selection of respondents given that I could only speak to the women who were still working at the factory where they participated in the Women in Factories training. The women who had already left may have seen more significant changes in their life, such as marriage (many women move to another place after marriage and some of them stop working) or career advancement in another factory.

Nonetheless, I was able to speak with a wide variety of women, and my interpreter and I established rapport and confidence during the first interviews and subsequent home visits. Of the fourteen women participants I interviewed, eight were working as tailors, two were checkers, and the remaining women were employed as a k/b operator (attaching buttons to garments), helper, packer, and caretaker, respectively. The women's working experience at

their factories ranged from four to nine years. Their ages ranged from 21 to 35 years old.<sup>2</sup> Half of the women had completed the foundational training, and half had done the advanced training. Six of them were married, four were single, three had separated from their husbands and one woman was a widow. There was a wide variety in the amount of schooling the women had completed, from no formal education whatsoever to taking the pre-university course (PUC). Because of the variety in ages and marital status, there was also significant variety in the composition of the women's households. Those who were married were mostly living with their nuclear family (husband and kids). The women who had not been married yet lived with one or more of their parents and siblings. Two of the women who had separated from their husbands were now living in the same house as their mother again. Table 1 overviews the household members that different respondents are living them, and how many of them are doing paid work.

---

<sup>2</sup> I was unable to confirm the age of two women respondents.

Table 1: Overview of respondents

Respondent's occupation:	Grade completed in school:	Age:	Marital status:	The respondent lives with:	# of household members doing paid work / total # of household members:
Tailor	1	34	Separated	Her mother and son	1/3
Tailor	1	27	Separated	Her mother, brother, sister-in-law, son and two daughters	2/7
Tailor	PUC*	29	Unmarried	Her mother, father, brother, sister, and nephew	4/6
Checker	3	32	Married	Her husband, mother-in-law, son and daughter	2/5
Tailor	10	32	Married	Her husband and two daughters	2/4
Tailor	7	29	Married	Her husband and son	2/3
Tailor	10	24	Unmarried	Her mother, father, cousin, and brother	3/5
Checker	10	25	Married	Her husband, son and daughter	2/4
Packer	10	21	Unmarried	Her mother and father	3/3
Helper	1	?	Married	Her husband	2/2
Tailor	?	23	Unmarried	Her mother, two brothers, two sisters, a nephew, a cousin and her grandmother	4/9
Tailor	10	33	Married	Her husband and two sons	2/4
Caretaker	PUC*	?	Widow	Her mother and two sons	1/4
K/B	9	35	Separated	Her two daughters	3/3

\*PUC = Pre-University Course (two years of intermediate schooling after completing secondary school).

#### 4.2.4 INFORMANTS

In addition to the fourteen women participants and their family members, the respondents in my research, I also interviewed a number of informants who helped me understand the context of the women's working and home lives.

In two of the factories, I interviewed an HR manager. The managers told me about the Women in Factories program from the factory's perspective. In semi-structured interviews, they discussed the motivation of the management to participate in the program, their experience with the program and the way in which they selected participants for the advanced stage of the program. I also learned more about the opportunities that the factory offered to the women participants, for example with regards to career advancement.

During my time at the Swasti office in Bangalore, I spoke with several employees who work as trainers for the life skills program, i.e. who regularly travel to factories to facilitate a training for one of the empowerment projects that Swasti works on. I also learned more about the background of the Women in Factories program from conversations with the coordinator of Swasti's life skills program. These informants gave me more insight into the procedure and contents of the training program, as well as Swasti's considerations to take part in it.

In order to get a better understanding of other empowerment programs that have been developed for women garment workers in South India, I spoke with representatives from two organizations: Cividep and the Fair Wear Foundation. Cividep is an Indian NGO that "attempts to empower workers and communities and to ensure that businesses comply with human and labour rights and environmental standards." (Cividep 2017) The Fair Wear Foundation is a not-for-profit foundation which "works with brands, factories, trade unions, NGOs and sometimes governments to verify and improve workplace conditions in 11 production countries in Asia, Europe and Africa." (Fair Wear Foundation 2017) I conducted semi-structured interviews with Cividep's director, Gopinath Parakuni, and the Fair Wear Foundation's country representative for India, Suhasini Singh. They told me about the work that their organizations had been doing with respect to women's empowerment, and specifically about the supervisory training programs for women that both organizations have been involved in. I also spoke with Cividep team members Rekha Chakravarthi and Parvathi Madappa about their vision on women workers' empowerment and the experience of women garment workers in South India. Together, these informants from Cividep and the Fair Wear Foundations thus gave me a broader perspective in terms of the garment industry in South India, and the other empowerment projects that are out there for women garment workers. The broader understanding of different empowerment projects also helped me to see how different approaches to empowerment result in different practices.



## 4.3 RESEARCH TOOLS

In this section, I will outline the research tools that I have used: observation, several types of interviews, and the analysis of publications about the Women in Factories program.

### 4.3.1 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Because of my interest in the women respondents' interactions at work and at home, participant observation was an important method. By visiting the women's factories, I got to see the women's working environment, how jobs were divided along gender lines, how the workers interacted with each other, and how the factories' architecture and interior design communicated the hierarchies in the workplace. My interpreter and I were also assigned a spot in this hierarchy. As visitors, we were given access to staff-only bathrooms, and were offered different food, that we ate separately from the workers. Experiencing how our treatment differed from that of the workers helped to understand the impact of power differentials at work. In this way, participant observation allowed me to build up 'embodied knowledge' about the factories' hierarchies (Madden 2010). The observations also gave me prompts for discussions with respondents and informants; referring to things I had seen inside the factory allowed for a more specific conversation.

In addition to the domain of the workplace, I studied the women's home lives and the roles that they were expected to fulfil there. I visited ten of the fourteen women respondents at their homes to see how certain tasks were divided along gender lines and how different household members interacted with each other. During these home visits, my interpreter and I met with, and had informal conversations with, the women and their family members (parents, siblings, husband, children, etc.), who told us more about the gender roles that were at work in their household, and how they envisioned the future of the family. I used notes from the semi-structured interviews with the women respondents as input for these conversations, but also had some go-to questions with respect to gender roles.

The home visits were less casual than I had anticipated. I had planned on taking on the role of an 'observing participant' (Bernard 2011) during the home visits, assisting the women with everyday household tasks to gain insights into the meaning of 'gender roles' in practice, i.e. the energy that it takes to complete the tasks that they are expected to fulfil, and also to establish a connection with the women based on our shared experience. However, each time I arrived at a respondent's home with an interpreter, the respondent and her family members were quick to offer us a seat, and subsequently serve us food and/or drinks while other family members gathered around to find out what we were doing, and why. And each time I attempted to steer the interaction into another, less formal direction, by suggesting that the respondent did not have to go through all this effort for us, I was reminded that it was the other way around, since it was a pleasure to serve guests. I understood that this setting, where I performed my role as the guest and my hosts played their part, made the household

members most comfortable. So, rather than an 'observing participant', my role during the visits was closer to that of a 'participant observer' (Bernard 2011), i.e., interacting with the respondents and their family members and spending time with them at their homes, but clearly keeping my position as an outsider to their everyday life. This made it more difficult to get a 'first person' perspective of what it is like to live the way that my respondents do, but it allowed me to witness more of the interactions between different household members, which helped me understand power dynamics within the households. I also got to see where the respondents lived, in what neighborhood and what kind of environment. Furthermore, informal interviews with respondents and their family members gave me insight in what different household members expected from each other, also based on their gender and age.

In addition to the women respondents' workplaces and homes, another environment where I conducted participant observation was the Swasti office, where I spent many working days transcribing interviews and planning new factory or home visits. I witnessed how members of the life skills team dealt with the management of different empowerment programs, and the different activities that were required from them. This helped me to contextualize the Women in Factories program in relation to other empowerment programs, and the organization that the different programs required 'behind the scenes'.

#### **4.3.2 INTERVIEWS**

In addition to observation, interviewing was another key method for my research. I wanted to know how the women respondents reflected on their working lives and home lives, and learn more about their personal histories. In this section I outline the three types of interviews I have conducted: semi-structured, informal, and life history interviews.

While I had expected my first interactions with the women respondents to be quite informal (i.e. small talk, introducing myself and getting to know them, to build rapport), the logistical limitations to accessing the respondents called for a more structured approach. Conducting the initial interviews during working hours put a time limitation on the first interviews, since the factories' production managers did not want to go without their workers for too long. Besides, two of the factories were several hours away by cab. This meant that I could not assume I would be able to meet all of my respondents for a second time, because it involved a significant investment of time and money (i.e. arranging the transportation as well as an interpreter). To ensure I would get a solid picture of the women's experiences during our very first meeting, I conducted semi-structured interviews with all fourteen women (see Appendix A for the topic list that I used). In these interviews, we talked about the women's working lives and home lives, as well as their memories and reflections about the Women in Factories program. I started each interview with an 'icebreaker' of sorts, in which I showed the respondents selfies and other pictures of my everyday activities in Bangalore on my phone, and then asked them to describe their average day. At the end of each interview, I

asked whether the respondent would feel comfortable with the interpreter and me visiting her home. All fourteen agreed to this.

I also used the method of semi-structured interviews with most of my informants. With the exception of Swasti employees, I only met my informants once, and thus wanted to make sure that we would discuss the most important topics, while also allowing room for their suggestions and additions based on their expertise.

During the home visits and during my time at the Swasti office, I conducted informal interviews. Concerning the home visits, I was never sure what to expect from the home visits in terms of the people that would be present and to what extent I could steer the conversations (given that there would be several different people who all spoke a language that I did not speak). Therefore, I mostly improvised the conversations, while occasionally taking a look at some key points that I had written down to summarize the first interview I had conducted with the respondent. The informal nature of the conversations helped to make people feel at ease with the interpreter and me, and also meant that all sorts of different topics came up based on what the different household members were interested in. This helped me to get an understanding of the things they find important in life. The questions that they asked me about my reason for being there, the purpose of my study, and my home country, also gave me an idea of how the respondents and other household members saw me.

I also used the method of informal interviews during my time at Swasti. Although I conducted a few semi-structured interviews with Swasti trainers early in my fieldwork phase (to get a general idea of the Women in Factories program and the vision of different trainers) and towards the end (to fill in some of the gaps in my knowledge), I also learned more about living in Bangalore, working for an empowerment program, and Swasti's approach, through informal conversations. Since most employees had a busy day-to-day schedule, it was often easier to just ask a question and have a quick chat than to schedule an interview. While participant observation helped me to understand the present-day reality of working as a trainer for Swasti, the informal conversations also allowed me to form a picture of how the Women in Factories program had evolved over time, and of the trainers' backgrounds.

Based on the data I had collected in the semi-structured interviews and during the home visits, I met two of the respondents for a third time to conduct a life history interview. I found their stories interesting illustrations of the structural limitations that women workers can face at home and in the workplace, and used these follow-up interviews to find out more about their personal background, including their childhood. This helped me to contextualize what they had told me in the first semi-structured interview and what I had seen and heard during the home visits. The life history interviews also helped me understand the implications of

cultural practices such as dowry and arranged marriages - for these two respondents, but for the others as well.

### **4.3.3 ANALYSIS OF PUBLICATIONS ABOUT THE WOMEN IN FACTORIES PROGRAM**

In addition to conducting interviews and observing, I also analysed various documents that were useful to contextualize the Women in Factories program, to get a clear idea of the program's full contents, and to understand the intentions behind the program.

Since the Women in Factories program was on a hiatus during my time in Bangalore (meaning that no trainings were taking place while I was there), I could only base my information about the training sessions on secondary sources: conversations with the people that were involved with it (trainers and participants) and instruction manuals that outlined the contents of every training session. I read the training manuals for the foundational and advanced training programs, which clarified the relative 'weight' of different topics, i.e. how much time was spent on the different themes, and the key messages that participants were taught about these topics (CARE 2012a; CARE 2012b). A workbook that was distributed to participants of the foundational training served as an additional source for this, as it outlined the most important messages (Swasti n.d.).

I also read and analysed published materials in which Walmart and Swasti presented success stories about the Women in Factories, highlighting how participating in the program had changed the home life and working life of the participants, and how this had benefited their relatives, neighbors, colleagues and employers. I read different fact sheets from Walmart about the program, and a collection of case stories that Swasti had authored (Walmart 2013; Walmart 2015; Swasti 2014). I also watched a video recording of a summit that Swasti had held in early 2017, at which factory managers and women workers shared their stories about being a part of the Women in Factories program (Swasti 2017a). I transcribed relevant parts of this video for future reference.

Finally, Walmart financed a study from Tuft University's Labor Lab. A group of researchers from this lab (where "experimental research for dignity at work" is conducted) has been working on a randomized controlled trial of the WIF training program in El Salvador, Honduras, Bangladesh and India since 2014. The results for Bangladesh and India were published in working papers in July 2017 (Babbitt et al. 2017a; Babbitt et al. 2017b).

I used these documents as input for the topic lists that I prepared for my interviews.

## **4.4 SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

I recorded each semi-structured interview and the two life history interviews that I conducted, in addition to taking notes. I later made a full transcript of each recording. I also kept notes about general observations and the factory and home visits, and highlighted interesting segments of the documents from Walmart and Swasti about the program. About halfway into the fieldwork phase, I did a first round of coding, to review the information I had gathered up until that point, and identify the topics that still merited more attention. I used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches to coding (Bernard 2011): while there were certain topics that I knew to look for based on my topic lists, I also looked for additional recurring themes that came up organically during the interviews and observations. I used this mid-term review as input for the interviews that were still to come. After the fieldwork phase, I used the codes that had arisen from the first coding round as input for my second round of coding, keeping in mind that new topics had to be added. Identifying the recurring themes in the stories of different respondents and informants helped me to define the structure of this thesis, revealing the key insights that could be used to build the main argument.

## **4.5 NEGOTIATED ACCESS; REFLECTION ON POSITIONALITY**

There were several barriers to my access to the field, and the choices I made to overcome those barriers affected my position in the field, and the freedom that I had to navigate it. As Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2008, 549) have remarked, in research contexts in which researchers cannot approach their potential participants directly, they “have to negotiate access through a diverse group of gatekeepers”. The gatekeepers in my research include the people from Swasti I worked with, as well as the managers in the factories who set up interviews with women workers. Gatekeepers have the power “to determine the ways in which potential participants are informed about the study and the process of consent, which may influence potential participants’ willingness to participate” (Wiles et al. 2005 as cited in Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert 2008).

As I described above, my access to the women respondents and their workplaces was arranged through Swasti, the Indian implementing partner for the Women in Factories program. My collaboration with them meant that I was introduced to people from the factory management and my respondents as a representative from Swasti. The first interviews took place on the factory premises. However, I wanted to ensure that my respondents could also share opinions that were critical of their workplace or the Women in Factories program, if they wanted to. In the first interviews, most respondents highlighted the positive aspects of their workplace and the Women in Factories program. It seemed that the respondents were more comfortable discussing their working environment at a distance, when they were at home. The fact that my interpreter and I took the time to visit them also reiterated our commitment to them. Upon our arrival, many respondents told us that they

had been awaiting our visit with anticipation, and some said they were surprised that we really ended up visiting them.

My position as an intern with Swasti also meant that I felt responsible for maintaining a good relationship with the people I worked with in the organization. After all, I depended on them to reach out to factory managers for me, arrange for transportation, and so on, and I was grateful for their help. The 'Life Skills for All' team members gave the impression that they were highly convinced of the benefits of the programs that they were working on, including the Women in Factories program, and it seemed that the easiest way for me to fit in was to agree with this. For example, different employees kept asking me whether I could share some 'nice stories' from my respondents yet. Early in the fieldwork phase, I was also told that the relationship with the factories was very important, and had to remain cordial. When I did bring up observations about limitations faced by the women in their workplaces, it did not seem like Swasti's employees saw a role for themselves in addressing these issues. Taking into consideration the efforts to balance 'attempts to become an insider' with 'attempts to preserve distance' in order to maintain a neutral position, as described by Ergun and Erdemir (2010), I stayed on the 'safe side' of keeping my cards (i.e. my initial reactions to some of the respondents' stories) close to my chest. My hesitance to openly question some of the elements of the Women in Factories program that puzzled me may have kept me from discovering more critical reflections on the program from some of the team members. In other words, it could be that the team's opinion on this program is not as uniform as I initially made it out to be, but I did not pursue this question during the fieldwork.

In addition to the 'invisible' aspects of my identity, like the role of an intern at Swasti, there were also clearly visible identity markers that made me stand out and affected my interactions with all the respondents and informants. As a young white woman, my presence never went unnoticed. Even walking in a public park, I was asked to be in selfies with people I didn't know and with whom I could barely communicate, just because my whiteness made me 'interesting'. Given the fact that my research is partially based on participant observation, in which I can be considered not just as 'the researcher' but as the 'tool' for research as well, it is important to be aware of the way in which my personal characteristics may have affected my interactions with respondents and informants, and how it affected my position as an 'insider' or 'outsider', or something in between, in different contexts (Ergun and Erdemir 2010). This reflexivity will contribute to more valid research (Madden 2010).

While I initially feared that my identity as a westerner, i.e., an obvious outsider, might make me seem imposing and perhaps less accessible, I think the fact that I was a young woman meant that people's curiosity usually outweighed a sense of reverence. During the home visits, I often emphasized that anyone could ask me questions if they wanted to, to avoid a situation in which I was only 'getting' information and others were only 'giving' it to me. Many respondents and their family members thus asked me about my background, how I

ended up in Bangalore, what it is like to live in the Netherlands, and so on. Besides, my position as a very obvious outsider who is not embedded in the respondents' social contexts may have made it easier for some to confide in me (see Hill Collins 1986).

I am not arguing that this led to a situation in which power differentials and my privileges ceased to exist. In different conversations with respondents' family members, I felt that I was considered a 'representative of the west'. They would ask me what I was going to tell other people in my country about what I had seen, and were always careful to check whether I was comfortable in their home, eating their food. To some extent, I understood this as hospitality, but in some cases, it also seemed that people were 'afraid to do something wrong' in my presence, which ran counter to my intention of building a rapport and making everyone feel at ease. In those instances, my outsider identity was more salient than I would have liked. Nonetheless, I think my position as a western woman also added something interesting to the interactions, namely, the fact that I'm usually on the receiving end of the garments supply chain, as a consumer, and the women respondents are the ones working on the supply side. In a few of the home visits, I 'reported back' about the shops in the Netherlands where the finished garments ended up, and about their popularity with Dutch consumers.

My inability to speak any of the local languages formed another barrier to the field. I searched for, and found, two women who helped me bridge this barrier, by interpreting Kannada and Tamil back to English for me, and translating my questions to the respondents' languages. This means that I had less control over the interactions than I had been used to until this research. I could never know exactly how a translated version of my question would come across to the respondents, and whether my interpreters struck the same tone as I had intended. Because the interpreters had a lot more in common with the respondents than I did, there were inadvertently some moments, especially during the home visits, where I felt more like an outsider to the interactions, always pondering when to intervene and ask for a translation, which could also interrupt a process of trust building between the interpreter and the respondents. The home visits were thus a clear example of interactions in which I went back and forth in attempting to be an 'insider' or opting to be the 'outsider' (Ergun and Erdemir 2010). In any case, the interpreters fulfilled a much bigger role than 'only' translating language - their position as a local resident added value to the project, by helping me understand the cultural context and 'filtering out' questions that would be inappropriate in that context (I describe an example of this in Chapter 6). They also assisted with the logistics of the research, figuring out where to meet respondents, and asking for directions when we could not find a respondent's home based on the description that we had been given.

Finally, a cultural barrier that I was not able to cross concerns India's caste system. I had anticipated including caste as one of the identity markers in a discussion of intersecting identity markers that matter to the women respondents' lives. However, having been brought up in a cultural context that does not include caste, I quickly learned that this system

was very difficult for me as an outsider to recognize in practice. An employee at Swasti explained how subtle caste distinctions were made, hidden away in rituals that I, as an outsider, would hardly be able to detect, because I was not familiar with any of these rituals in the first place, and was only starting to learn 'the norm'. Therefore, I decided not to include a discussion of caste in this research. It can be considered a 'blind spot' in the research, since caste probably plays a role in determining the range of choices that the women respondents can make, just as gender, age, and socio-economic status (which are included in this research) do.

My role as a researcher also implies a responsibility towards the respondents to ensure that the research does not cause them harm. Although it was in my interest that the women respondents were candid in their discussions about both their personal and working lives, I would not want them to risk punishment for making remarks about their workplace that their employer doesn't like. As mentioned in the section about selecting the respondents, one of them explicitly said that her superiors expected her to tell a positive story about the factory and the Women in Factories program. I then reiterated that her honesty was very valuable to the research, and her responses would remain anonymous. The respondents' real names have been replaced with fictitious ones for this purpose, and I am only revealing details about their personal circumstances that are relevant to the points I'm arguing in the thesis.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodology that I used to answer the central questions in this research. I have used different types of interviews (informal, semi-structured and life history interviews), observation, and the analysis of publications. I met fourteen women participants of the Women in Factories program at their workplaces and homes, to learn more about their everyday interactions at work and at home. At their homes, I also had conversations with family members to help me understand dynamics within the household. Furthermore, interviews with informants, and my analysis of publications about the Women in Factories, helped to contextualise the program, improving my understanding of South India's garment sector, the factories' motivation, and the background of different empowerment programs. In this research, I worked closely with people from Swasti's 'Life Skills For All' team, who helped me to access the factories and the women participants who were employed there. I am aware that this has affected my position as a researcher, given that I was introduced as a representative of Swasti, and was dependent on the organisation for access. In addition to being an intern for Swasti, I am also a young, white, woman from the Netherlands, which affected my interactions with respondents and informants as well. It is important to point out this positionality, as this is an inherent part of my methodology. In the next three chapters, I turn to the findings yielded by the methodology described above.



## 5. Women in Factories: context, contents, structure, procedure

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

*Together with my interpreter and a trainer from Swasti, I enter the premises of Factory 2. We report to a duo of security officers who register the purpose of our visit and hand us a visitor badge. The factory building looks imposing, with double doors and a giant 'WELCOME' mat, and its tall structure of columns, that vaguely resembles a temple from the Roman empire.*

*Inside, the reception looks like that of a hotel lobby. On the wall behind the front desk, a printed quote from Gandhi is displayed in a frame: "A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption of our work, he is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider of our business, he is part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him, he is doing us a favour by giving us the opportunity to do so." (Notes on factory visit, August 29, 2017)*

In this chapter, I will give an overview of the Women in Factories program, outlining the background, structure, content and intentions of the program. Walmart set up this program in 2012 as part of a larger empowerment initiative for women, and set out to teach 'critical life skills' to over 60.000 women, as well as giving a selection of these women an advanced training that would prepare them for more responsibilities in the workplace. The way the program is framed by Walmart and its Indian partner NGO, Swasti, reveals an instrumentalist approach (Sardenberg 2008) to the women's empowerment; the Women in Factories program is depicted as a tool to make workers more productive and increase profits.

I show that the program's modules are mainly focused on practical skills and non-political knowledge to improve health, communication and financial practices, among others. Thus, the program merely teaches the participants how to deal with their position in the 'inequality regime' (Acker 2006), rather than suggesting that this regime and its distribution of rewards could be challenged. The inequality regime is thus normalized. While the advanced training program is aimed at experienced workers who can disseminate what they have learned to their colleagues and who are most likely to move forward in their career, in some cases factories have actually sent less motivated, less productive workers to the advanced training. This further reinforces the inequality regime within factories.

Reviewing the contents of the program, as well as the way the program is organized and framed by Walmart and Swasti, it becomes clear that the kind of empowerment that Walmart and Swasti advocate resonates with 'liberal empowerment' as defined by Sardenberg (2008): an empowerment that is de-politicized, individualized, and focusing on technical and instrumental aspects. To close out the chapter, I give a description of two other empowerment programs for women garment workers organized by two NGOs, which are

more engaged with the power dynamics that are surrounding the garment sector, and, as such, are more closely aligned with 'liberating empowerment' (Sardenberg 2008).

### **5.2.1 THE WOMEN IN FACTORIES PROGRAM: BACKGROUND**

Walmart and the Walmart Foundation launched the Global Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative in September 2011. In a fact sheet released by the company in 2013 the initiative is described as "an effort that leverages our global size and scale to improve women's lives across the world" (Walmart 2013). The initiative, which was set to reach nearly one million women, was composed of several programs, targeting women in agriculture supply chains in 'emerging markets', young women in the western hemisphere, economically vulnerable women in the US, women and minorities employed by Walmart, and women working in factories in southeast Asia and central America.

In the factsheet, Walmart explains that its initiative for women's empowerment is also beneficial to the company itself. "Walmart believes empowering women economically will make us a more successful retailer. The majority of our 200 million customers are women, and women control \$20 trillion of annual consumer spending globally. Our women's empowerment initiative will help us better serve and understand our customers around the World" (Ibid.) The part of the initiative that I am focusing on, the Women in Factories program, is also depicted as a tool that can improve business, as it makes the participating workers more productive. I will first go on to describe the Women in Factories program in more detail, before returning to this point.

Walmart introduced its Women in Factories program in April of 2012. This five-year program would consist of two parts. The first part, the foundational program, targeting all workers in the participating factories, would teach 'critical life skills' to more than 60,000 women working in 150 factories in India, Bangladesh, China, Honduras and El Salvador. Critical life skills as defined by Walmart include communication, nutrition, hygiene, gender sensitivity and health. The foundational program would take fifteen hours to complete. Furthermore, 8000 women would be given the opportunity to receive leadership and career development training in the so-called advanced program. This program would take a hundred hours. The ultimate goal of Women in Factories was to "create a stronger pipeline of talent for factories around the world and empower women to advocate for themselves in their homes, workplaces and communities." (Walmart 2013) The Walmart Foundation had spent \$10.7 million in grants on the Women in Factories program by 2014 (Walmart 2015).

### **5.2.2 THE WOMEN IN FACTORIES PROGRAM IN INDIA**

Walmart developed the Women in Factories curriculum in partnership with the NGO CARE, and selected a different NGO as the implementing partner for the program in each country. Health Resource Center Swasti was selected as the implementing partner for the program in

India. Swasti has been involved in several other brand-sponsored empowerment programs, such as the HERproject and Gap Inc's P.A.C.E. program (HERproject 2017; Gap Inc. 2017). Shankar, who manages Swasti's 'Life Skills for All' team, explained that the organization engages with these programs based on the consideration that they contribute to physical, mental, spiritual and social health of the participants.<sup>3</sup>

Swasti rolled out the Women in Factories program in factories across India over a five-year period in three different phases. This research focuses on women participants who took part in the program in its first phase. This phase included fifteen factories, spread across three Indian states: Tamil Nadu (9 factories), Karnataka (4), and Gujarat (2) (Swasti, 2014). Swasti employs trainers who go into these factories to facilitate the training sessions in the workers' native languages. The participants are trained in batches, so that there are about 30 to 40 workers for every trainer in a given session. By January 2017, Swasti had trained over 26,000 women in 34 factories (Swasti, 2017).

Most of the fifteen Indian factories that were included in the first phase of Women in Factories were garment factories. Two flower companies and a pen factory were included as well. Before the start of Phase 1, Walmart reached out to different managers from supplier companies in Walmart's supply chain to discuss their willingness to participate. Participation in the program required a time commitment from the factories, as they would send their workers to training sessions during working hours<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the sessions required an appropriate 'training room' on the factory premises. Sathish, a trainer from Swasti, told me that another consideration for supplier companies had to do with compliance to national and international standards. A supplier company would nominate the factory unit (or units) that has been performing best in terms of compliance, since participation in the program would also lead to more scrutiny from Walmart's representatives (e.g. visits to the factory site).<sup>5</sup>

The fifteen-hour foundational training program teaches workers about concepts and practices related to five different topics: communication, managing work and career, gender awareness, health, and applying these learnings to the workplace. The training facilitators used discussions, role plays and games to bring the key points across to the participants. Sathish from Swasti explained that he and the other facilitators are constantly trying out new methods, and sharing information about their effectiveness. He emphasized that they never used any powerpoint presentations. This made the training stand out from other trainings

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview, October 13, 2017

<sup>4</sup> It was up to the factories to decide when the training sessions would take place (e.g. the 15-hour foundational program could be spread across only two days, or divided into 2-hour sessions). If a factory chose to schedule a session after working hours, they had to pay additional overtime wages for the participants.

<sup>5</sup> Notes on factory visit, September 20, 2017

the workers may have attended in the past and ensured that they were engaged.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, each participant was given a workbook to test the reader's comprehension of the different learnings, and to encourage the participants to revise what they have learned individually and share this with others (such as family members at home). The first sentence in the workbook states its purpose from the perspective of the reader: "I will adapt the learning's [sic] from this training to my personal and professional life and improve the quality of my life" (Swasti n.d.).

The modules that make up the foundational training focus on teaching women strategies to deal with problems that they may encounter in their day-to-day work life and personal life, and factual information about health practices. While the foundational training was given to all the workers in the participating factories, a small selection of women participants (120 women per factory) was invited to take part in the advanced training. This training elaborates on most of the topics that are covered in the foundational training, and also adds two new topics: 'functional literacy and personal finances', and leadership. The training manual for the advanced training emphasizes the importance of the latter module in the program: "This unit [on leadership] is the culmination of the entire training program: preparing women to take on greater leadership responsibilities within factories." (CARE 2012b) In Table 2, I have outlined the key messages and concepts that are discussed in the foundational and advanced parts of the Women in Factories program. In each of the modules, the emphasis is on the participants' individual agency to improve their living standards.

---

<sup>6</sup> Interview, October 4, 2017

Table 2: Key messages and concepts in the two phases of the Women in Factories program (CARE 2012a; CARE 2012b)

Topic:	Key messages/concepts in <u>foundational training</u> (15 hours):	Key messages/concepts in <u>advanced training</u> (100 hours):
Communication	Importance of effective communication, different communication styles (passive, aggressive, assertive), communication skills (listening, acknowledging, summarizing), (mis)understandings	Collaborative communication, assertive communication, discussing money, discussing family planning, active listening, debating, tailoring communication to an audience, worker- management dialogues
Health	<p><b>Nutrition:</b> balanced diet, importance of breakfast, anemia</p> <p><b>General health:</b> Safe water, washing hands</p> <p><b>Reproductive health:</b> menstrual hygiene, family planning methods</p> <p><b>Occupational health and safety:</b> personal protective equipment &amp; safety in the factory</p>	<p><b>Nutrition:</b> balanced diet and nutritional value, affordable nutritious food, meal plans</p> <p><b>General health:</b> barriers to sanitation and hygiene, common illnesses (prevention, identification and treatment) stress management, available health resources in the community</p> <p><b>Reproductive health:</b> reproductive anatomy, family planning methods, pregnancy and birth, infant and child feeding, childhood development, prevention and treatment of common STIs (including HIV), communication about safe sex</p>
Managing work and career	Internal and external causes of stress, consequences of stress, managing stress in positive ways, time management	<i>Not included in the advanced program</i>
Gender	Difference between sex and gender, gender socialization, stereotypes and discrimination, equal participation in family decision-making	Flexibility of gender roles, interlinkages between gender and power, ideas about the 'ideal' man and woman, socially defined gender roles, stereotypes, understanding pressures and privileges of masculinity and femininity, personal attitudes and values about gender & power, social status and discrimination, mobility mapping, communication between men and women, social causes and consequences of violence against women (VAW), identifying prevention methods and resources relating to VAW, perspectives on dowry and identifying its negative consequences

Applying the learning to the workplace	Role of worker in the global supply chain, different sections in the factory, importance of producing good quality products on time, shared responsibility between management and workers, disseminating and refreshing learnings at work	<i>Not included in the advanced program</i>
Functional literacy and personal finance	<i>Not included in the foundational program</i>	Reading and writing simple sentences, filling out forms, reading and writing numbers, solving mathematical problems, calculating wages and overtime payment, budgeting and prioritizing expenses, basic English vocabulary
Leadership	<i>Not included in the foundational program</i>	Qualities of a good leader, decision-making skills, motivating others, responding to others' emotions and stress, conflict resolution techniques, critical thinking about media, rights and laws (about trafficking, sexual harassment, labor rights, reproductive rights, voting rights, divorce law, maternity leave rights), learning about political participation and government benefits & legal resources, time management and prioritizing, setting goals, taking inspiration from role models

Of the topics listed in Table 2, there were a few that clearly stood out to the respondents. The different sessions about health had left the biggest impression on them. Asked about their memories of taking part in the Women in Factories program and the most useful topic in the training, all of the women participants mentioned one or more health-related topics (e.g. mentioning a change in their dietary practice, or things that they had learned about cleanliness). A majority of them also mentioned topics related to communication and finances. Gender, on the other hand, was only mentioned by three of the respondents as a topic that they found most useful.

### 5.2.3 WHO TO 'EMPOWER'? THE SELECTION PROCEDURE

As I mentioned earlier, the foundational part of the Women in Factories is targeting all workers in the factories that participate, but the advanced part was only offered to 120 women in each factory. Sushma, a trainer from Swasti, explained that the selection of these participants was largely the responsibility of the factory, but Swasti did suggest several criteria to keep in mind: 80% attendance during the foundational training, working experience in the factory, and the woman's ability to teach others. Furthermore, it was

practical to select people from different batches in the factory (eg. cutting, sewing, finishing) to ensure that production would not be affected too much. Sushma also mentioned that the people in charge of production were initially inclined to send their less productive workers to the advanced training, since they did not want their more experienced and better performing workers to be absent. However, this was not the intention behind the program.<sup>7</sup>

HR managers at two different factories explained their selection procedure. The first one said that the focus in the selection was on choosing a group of women who are diverse in terms of age and the department that they work in, and who are able to pass on what they have learned to their colleagues as well.<sup>8</sup> In the other factory, however, the HR manager revealed that they had selected their least productive, least motivated workers for the training. Recalling the workers that had been selected in his factory, the HR manager said: “[T]hey are not showing any interest in any work, they are very dull in their work (...) Skill level is low when compared to others, we will select that kind of people.”<sup>9</sup> He said that participation in the advanced training could make these workers more productive.

Given that the advanced program, and especially its module on leadership, was set up to offer well-performing workers an opportunity to take on more responsibility, this approach seems to run counter to the core goal of the advanced program. Rather than helping to challenge it, this approach to the selection could help to preserve the inequality regime (Acker 2006) that is present in the factory, seeing as the least motivated and least productive women workers are probably less inclined to take on a job with more responsibilities, while the most motivated and most productive workers may be denied the opportunity to do so.

#### 5.2.4 ‘HAPPY FACTORY, HAPPY WORKERS’: INSTRUMENTALIST UNDERSTANDING OF EMPOWERMENT

Taking a closer look at publications from Walmart and Swasti about the Women in Factories program reveals an instrumentalist understanding of empowerment on the part of the brand and its implementing partner. In this understanding, empowerment becomes a tool (or ‘instrument’) to achieve another goal, namely, better business. Figure 1 shows an illustration from the back cover of the workbook for participants of the foundational training, depicting a factory surrounded by smiling emojis and stars, with the slogan ‘happy factory, happy workers’.



Figure 1: Illustration on the back cover of the workbook for the Women in Factories foundational training (Swasti n.d.)

<sup>7</sup> Interview, July 27, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Interview, September 20, 2017

<sup>9</sup> Interview, October 4, 2017

The illustration is furthermore accompanied by the text “Empowering Lives... Impacting Business: Empower Workforce for Better Business”.

Another example of the instrumentalist understanding of empowerment can be found in the report ‘Good Business, Doing Good’ (Swasti 2015). This report describes positive changes for the women at home, but also cites various examples of women becoming more productive, showing up at their factory in time, giving notice before taking leave and being more respectful to their supervisors. In short, the women in these stories have become better workers that are more easily managed by their superiors. Likewise, in the training manuals, notes for the factory managers emphasize the benefits of the different modules for worker productivity. For example, on a module about early childhood development (which is part of the advanced training), the manual says:

*“Healthy children at home will mean that female workers can concentrate better on their jobs and miss fewer days of work.”* (CARE 2012b)

A study conducted by Tufts University researchers (Babbitt et al. 2017a; Babbitt et al. 2017b) that Walmart has supported with a million dollar grant (Walmart 2015) solidifies the notion that Women in Factories participants become ‘better workers’, i.e. more valuable assets to their factories. Results from a randomized controlled trial in seven factories in India and seven factories in Bangladesh show that participants show up in time more often, participants become more productive, and participants are more likely to remain employed at the factory (reducing the workforce turnover). However, in their analysis of participants of the advanced training, the authors point out that while the workers’ productivity increases, their rewards do not. The percentage of participants receiving a bonus declined, and the size of the bonus decreased in the months after the advanced training was completed. The authors explain: “Given that workers are more productive, we conclude that factories are adjusting pay incentives down to hold pay and hours fixed.” (Babbitt et al. 2017b) The benefits of improved productivity were not shared with the workers responsible for it.

#### **5.2.5 NORMALIZING THE ‘INEQUALITY REGIME’**

Indeed, in this program, set up as part of an economic empowerment initiative, there is little attention for the possibility of increasing the workers’ wages. Instead, the focus is largely on teaching the women strategies on how to make ends meet with the wage that they are currently earning. In other words, they are expected to rely on their individual agency to avoid financial problems. As shown in Table 2, the advanced program included a module about personal finance, in which the participants were taught about planning and prioritizing their expenses, making a budget, and saving money in a bank account. The training manual for the advanced program explains:



*“A common source of stress among poor people is worries over money. It is difficult to live on a small income. (...) When one’s resources are limited, it is even more important to be aware of income and expenses, to plan carefully, and to get into the habit of saving money on a regular basis, even if the amount is small.” (CARE 2012b)*

The responsibility to make ends meet is put entirely on the shoulders of the participants of the Women in Factories program, a significant portion of whom are assumed to be ‘poor people’. This strongly recalls the characterization from Hickel (2014, 1356) of empowerment in which “[w]omen and girls are made to bear the responsibility for bootstrapping themselves out of poverty that is caused in part by the very institutions that purport to save them.” Indeed, the structures that cause the poverty and subsequent stress that the training manual for Women in Factories describes are ignored altogether. Walmart plays a significant role in sustaining these structures as a buyer, as it influences the prices of the products and the timeframe in which they are to be delivered. But this element of the ‘inequality regime’ (Acker 2006), which reproduces the dynamics that lead the women workers to be ‘poor people’, as the manual calls them, is not acknowledged in the contents of the training program.

The dependency of factories on major buyers in the global supply chain, and the resulting downward pressure on workers’ wages, is further normalized and justified in the program. For example, in the manual for the foundational training program (on the module “applying our learning to the workplace”), trainers are instructed to explain the consequences of delayed production and/or production flaws on the factory’s profit, which is linked to the fate of the workers:

*“[R]elate how responsible behavior on the part of all employees is important for a factory to operate smoothly. A factory can only flourish through collaborative efforts of all concerned. If the factory makes more profit, **only then** it will be possible to provide more benefits to the all employees and workers.” (CARE 2012a, emphasis added)*

Thus, the training implies that the workers’ salaries are fully dependent on the profit of their employer. A concept like the ‘living wage’, which has been used to argue that there is be a minimum amount that workers should earn to cover all their basic needs, is not mentioned. Besides, as the Tufts study from Babbitt et al. (2017a; 2017b) shows, even if the workers do manage to make their factories more profitable, they are not necessarily rewarded for it, despite what the training manual implies. Suguna, one of the women respondents, reflected on the way in which her financial situation had changed since taking part in the Women in Factories program:

*“It has not helped them [her family] (...) financially, with any salary increase, or.. nothing as such. But she says: but at least we have learned a lot about it, like budget and all that. That way we are more, like, (...) much organized.” (Interview, September 23, 2017)*

The program's message about communication is also in accordance with the inequality regime. For example, the workbook states: "In a factory setting, one must understand the hierarchy & communicate accordingly" (Swasti n.d., 2). Reflecting on this module, several respondents emphasized that the training taught them to be more 'polite' to other people. Thus, the participants learn that they need to change their own behavior. A story included in a collection of participants' stories published by Swasti (2014, p. 37) reinforces this. Swasti reports that Vasanti, one of the participants, "has learned not only how to communicate but when to do so. For instance, when her supervisor rebukes her or shouts at her; rather than arguing back immediately as she used to before, she now listens, keeps silent, and then at an appropriate time speaks to them directly to address the underlying issue." There are several similar stories in the report about workers learning how to deal with being scolded or shouted at in the factory. These lessons reinforce the hierarchy inherent to the inequality regime.

### **5.3 OTHER EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS**

To allow for better contextualization of the Women in Factories program with respect to its approach to empowerment, I will describe two other empowerment programs that have been developed for women garment workers in South India by NGOs. These programs illustrate the implications of a conceptualization of empowerment which is not exclusively based on individual agency, but also engages with structural issues in the garment industry. I will first outline the key developments in Cividep and the Fair Wear Foundation's activities with regards to their women's supervisory training programs, and then highlight the most important differences between these two programs on the one hand, and 'Women in Factories' on the other.

#### **5.3.1 CONCEPTION OF THE WOMEN'S SUPERVISORY TRAINING PROGRAM**

Cividep was involved in the development of the so-called Women's Supervisory Training Program (WSTP), which came into being in the context of a series of roundtable discussions with different garment sector stakeholders, the Garment Sector Roundtable. The stakeholders acknowledged that sexual harassment was a significant issue in the sector, and agreed that one of the causes for this could be found in the unequal, gendered division of labour in factories, seeing as most supervisors and managers were men, while almost all of the workers they were supervising and managing were women. A program that trained women to become supervisors in the factory could therefore contribute to a reduction of sexual harassment and also offer women the chance to increase their mobility in the workplace.

Different consultants, including lawyers and trade union activists, formulated a seven-week curriculum (six days a week, eight hours a day) for the WSTP, which consisted of both 'soft skills' (including self-confidence, labor rights and human rights) and production skills (like learning how to manage a production line). One initial cycle of training took place, with about thirty participants from two different factories. About sixty percent of these participants landed a job as assistant supervisor or supervisor. Cividep was able to conduct a second run of the WSTP with funding from a US charity and from the participating manufacturers. Beyond that, however, there has not been sufficient funding to sustain the program in its original shape.

### **5.3.2 CONTINUATION AS FAIR WEAR FOUNDATION PROGRAM**

While the WSTP as introduced by Cividep did not receive enough financial support to continue in its original form, the model was adopted by the Fair Wear Foundation (FWF), which introduced a condensed version of the program to manufacturers of its member brands. The organization secured a grant from the EU Delegation to India to add the training program to their existing anti-harassment activities in South India. The EU helped finance the program from September 2014 until August 2017. Cividep is involved in this program as one of the implementing partners.

Like the WSTP that preceded it, FWF's training program consisted of technical and non-technical skills training for women workers. FWF was involved in a screening process, ensuring that the women who wanted to participate in the program saw a future for themselves working and growing in the garment industry in the long term. About a third of the women who participated in the program were promoted to a supervisory position in their factories. The women who got a promotion saw a growth in their income, ranging between 15 and 47%.<sup>10</sup>

About twenty factories took part in the EU-funded phase of FWF's supervisory training program. FWF and its member brands offered the program on a voluntary basis, free of cost. FWF was paying the women to compensate the wage they were missing out on. The training for women workers took ten days to complete: first, five consecutive training days were organized, and subsequently, the women would meet for a follow-up training day every fifteen days. Singh explained that this structure was more readily accepted by the participating factories: "I mean, looking from the business side, no management would want their workers to be away for ten (...) consecutive days, yeah. But if you space it out, then maybe they'll agree to it."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Suhasini Singh, February 1, 2018

<sup>11</sup> Interview, September 26, 2017

Now that the three-year funding period from the EU Delegation to India has ended, FWF is working on setting up a collaboration with the Fair Labor Association (FLA) to take the program forward and give the training to factories that supply to FLA members and brands that have signed the Dutch Sustainable Garment and Textile Sector agreement. FWF is hoping that the program will reach around three hundred factories in this new phase, which is set to start in April 2018.

### 5.3.3 KEY DIFFERENCES WITH THE WOMEN IN FACTORIES PROGRAM

There are a few key differences with regards to the contents of the Women in Factories program on the one hand, and the women's supervisory training programs that Cividep and FWF have been working on, on the other. These differences reveal different understandings of workers' empowerment. First of all, the Women in Factories does not include technical skills training, i.e. specific training about the skills that are necessary for the job of supervisor. The training programs from Cividep and the FWF do dedicate a significant part of the program to these skills.

Another key difference can be found in the attention, or lack thereof, to labour rights, trade unions and the living wage. Gopinath Parakuni of Cividep said that one of the questions he asks about women empowerment programs, in order to assess their adequacy, is whether the program includes people who are critical of the industry, and who have taken up serious issues raised by garment workers. In his view, any program aiming to improve the garment sector has to take into account the criticism that has been raised about the industry, when it comes to issues like harassment, but also wages and production targets. Therefore, it is important to listen to labour rights activists. Suhasini Singh from the FWF agreed that the inclusion of information about trade unions and living wage in their supervisory training curriculum is non-negotiable. She explained:

*"Normally factories are a little scared of.. Even uttering these words, in front of workers, like 'unions' or 'wages'. But ehm, such was the communication: that this is the training we are giving, we are not here to unionize ourselves, like 'let us come together and fight the management', not that, but (...) this is our job, to tell them what a union is, they should know, and they are free to decide if they want to become a member or not. (...) Factory management cannot stop us from, you know, educating them or telling them."*<sup>12</sup>

This is in stark contrast to the approach set out by the Women in Factories program. The advanced program includes two modules (out of 64) about legal rights and responsibilities.. The manual points out that "[t]he notion of "rights" may be sensitive in your country, or in the factory setting. The objective of this training or this module is not to advocate for new rights for workers, but to make participants aware of their rights that have already been

---

<sup>12</sup> Interview, September 26, 2017

established" (CARE 2012b). When I asked Sathish, a trainer for Swasti, whether trade unions were also discussed as part of this module, he explained that the factories would not agree to this because trade unions can be antagonizing, and therefore this is not something they focus on in the training.<sup>13</sup>

A success story shared by an HR manager for a Bangalore garment factory at the 2017 Women in Factories summit illustrates what message factories want their workers to learn and reproduce. In April 2016, thousands of Bangalore garment workers took to the streets to protest a change in the rules about the Provident Fund (PF), a savings instrument for employees (Yadav 2016). The HR manager at the summit told the audience:

*"[W]hen the strike happened on PF, in the factory where we have done this program, we've actually seen the peer educators, so the women who were part of the program, going and talking to the other ladies, telling them what is PF, explaining them, and telling them: this is not the right way of communicating or going to the road, you know, there's a better way of talking to the management, we can do it better inside the factory. So actually, the ladies, instead of going to the road and getting beaten up, were actually inside the factory and they have found that talking to management, getting more information is better than going out."*

(Swasti 2017a)

This anecdote underlines that the Women in Factories program is encouraging women workers to support existing structures. To summarize, a comparison between the Women in Factories program and supervisory training programs for women garment workers organised by Cividep and the Fair Wear Foundation shows that there is a significant difference in the extent to which there is room for criticism to the status quo, or the inequality regime, within the garment industry. The Women in Factories program corresponds strongly with the elements of liberal empowerment as defined by Sardenberg (2008): the program sidesteps political discussions about the structures surrounding women workers, in favour of individual, technical 'solutions' that rely on the women's personal agency. The programs that Cividep and the FWF have worked on, which pay attention to the power relations embedded in the global supply chain and to collective action (such as trade unions), are more closely aligned with liberating empowerment.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined the background, structure, content and intentions of Walmart's Women in Factories program. I have shown that the empowerment of the participants is framed by Walmart and its implementing partner Swasti reveals an instrumentalist approach to empowerment. Empowered workers are praised for their punctuality, increased productivity and reduced absence. However, it seems that they are not

---

<sup>13</sup> Notes on factory visit, October 4, 2017

seeing an economic benefit of this, despite suggestions from the program's manual to the contrary. In fact, through a focus on 'making ends meet', careful budgeting and planning, the participants' economically disadvantaged position within the global garments supply chain (i.e. the inequality regime) is normalized. Comparison with other empowerment programs for women garment workers furthermore shows that the Women in Factories program is much more reluctant to discuss issues of rights and collective action, which reinforces the notion that the Women in Factories program is closely aligned to what Sardenberg (2008) has called 'liberal empowerment'. In this kind of empowerment, individuals are expected to be able to solve their own problems, given the right training and skills. The focus is solely on individual agency, while the structures around the individual remain unchanged. However, a 'liberating empowerment' perspective recognizes that individual agency is limited by structures surrounding the individual, and issues that each individual is experiencing are actually inherent to the structures around them.

In the next chapter, I will go on to describe the experiences of the women participants that I have interviewed, looking at how they experience the gender roles that are at work in their working lives and home lives, and the structures in which these gender roles are embedded.

## 6. Navigating gender roles at work and at home

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

*I'm conducting an interview with Yallamma, on the premises of her workplace. I have listed my everyday activities in Bangalore (waking up, showering and getting dressed, eating breakfast, taking an Uber or Ola<sup>14</sup> to the office, preparing research on my laptop, having a tea break upstairs, going back to my apartment and having dinner) and ask Yallamma to do the same. At one point in her description, she laughs. My interpreter explains: "She's like, you know.. You said you'll, okay, you'll get up, you'll go to office, and you'll do this, but she's saying: but **our life is not like that, we have many more things to do, and [a] lot of cleaning, and washing, all that, we ourselves [have] to do it.**" (Interview, August 17, 2017. Emphasis added.)*

Gender awareness is a key topic within the Women in Factories curriculum, given its inclusion in both parts of the program (foundational as well as advanced). In this chapter, I turn to the everyday experiences of the women respondents who took part in the Women in Factories program, describing the gendered divisions of labor they encounter and perform at work and at home. I mainly draw on interviews with the fourteen women respondents and my observations from visiting their workplaces and homes. Paid employment and household production are two of the domains that make up the 'gender regime' as defined by Walby (2000). In the public patriarchy that she described, women can participate in paid employment and other public arenas, but find themselves in a subordinated position within those arenas. Indeed, my findings from the women's workplaces show that the respondents work in a sector that is predominantly fueled by female labor, but controlled by male managers. In other words, positions of power are unequally divided along gender lines in an inequality regime (Acker 2006). The women's working life is strongly linked to their home life - they work to help sustain their family, while the responsibilities that they face at home also limit the time they can spend working: they are expected to contribute to a 'second shift' of household tasks after each working day (Hochschild and Machung 1990). Based on the women's experiences in the factories and at home, gender, but also socio-economic status and age, arise as relevant identity markers that interact with each other in a 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins 1990). This matrix can be seen as a structure that determines the range of choices available to the respondents, and within which they exercise their agency.

I will first show how poverty in the respondents' childhoods limited their active agency (Kabeer 2005), as it led many of them to leave school sooner than they would have liked, and to look for paid work. I will then describe the gendered division of labor in the factories where they have ended up working, and the way in which this gendered 'inequality regime'

---

<sup>14</sup> Ola is a local ride sharing service. During the time of my stay it was the main competitor to Uber in the city of Bangalore.

(Acker 2006) is reproduced through hierarchies. I show that the women respondents use gendered stereotypes that arise from an essentialist notion of gender, to justify aspects of the division of labor. I also consider the way in which power differences between workers and their superiors are communicated in interactions and in the factories' designs, reinforcing and normalizing the workers' inferior position in the inequality regime at the workplace. The second part of this chapter concerns the women's home lives. I give an overview of the different tasks they are expected to fulfil as part of the 'second shift' (Hochschild and Machung 1990), and describe the pressure that relatives put on young women to get married, which is a costly but important event for the women and their families. It turns out that stereotypes based on essentialist notions of gender influence how the women and their family members perceive the gendered divisions of labor in their lives. In the conclusion I consider how a deviation from existing gender norms can be understood in the context of the performativity of gender (Butler 1988).

## 6.2 A DAY IN THE LIFE - FROM HOME TO WORK, AND BACK

While the women respondents' working lives and home lives are neatly separated for most of this chapter, the respondents are always moving back and forth between these two domains, and responsibilities from both domains are impacting upon the way in which they organize their time. Shilpa's story below illustrates the various responsibilities that the women respondents take on throughout an average working day.

*Shilpa usually wakes up around 6 o'clock in the morning on working days. First, she gets freshened up, and then she does cleaning tasks around the house. She and her sister help their mother with cooking, and they have breakfast. The factory van comes to pick Shilpa up around 8:30, so that she arrives at her workplace just before 9 o'clock. Upon her arrival, she first cleans her workplace and the machine, and washes her hands. Then she says a prayer together with her colleagues, praying that the work will go smoothly without disturbances. She then starts working. Her tasks as a tailor include all kinds of stitching work. At 1:30 Shilpa has her lunch time. Like most of her colleagues, she usually brings food from home, which she says is the best food - even better than the food that's available in a restaurant. Every now and then, she will buy lunch from the factory canteen, which costs about 20-35 rupees. Shilpa has half an hour to finish her lunch and starts working again at 2 o'clock sharp. Her working day ends at 5:30.*

*Overtime is a rare occurrence at Shilpa's factory, but if the targets do require them to work overtime, it is usually no more than an hour. On her way home, Shilpa usually does not take the factory van, because she'll go to buy vegetables for dinner on her way back, and takes a shortcut on foot. Once she is home, at around 6:30pm, Shilpa first takes some time to sit down with a cup of coffee and watch television. Then, once her mother starts cooking, she'll help her in the kitchen. The family - Shilpa, her mother, her brothers and sisters, and her grandmother - eats dinner at 9 o'clock at night. After dinner, Shilpa checks if her younger brother needs any*



*help with his homework. She also helps to prepare some ingredients for the next morning's breakfast. After she has finished her tasks for the night, Shilpa goes to bed.<sup>15</sup>*

Shilpa's story above illustrates the tight schedule that the respondents are operating on six days a week, given that there are many tasks to complete at home in addition to their paid work at the factory. The story also points to gendered divisions of labor at home: Shilpa shares the responsibility for household tasks with her mother and sister. In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe the women respondents' working lives and home lives in more detail, examining the way in which their gender, socio-economic status and age impact upon the range of choices available to them.

### **6.2.2 GENDER AT WORK**

*My interpreter, a trainer from Swasti and I enter Factory 1 on the first floor. We turn a corner to see, to our right, some dozen men at work under a sign that says 'Trim Issue'. We walk past them and pass several enclosed spaces: a training room, several offices, and finally, the spacious, air-conditioned conference room where the interviews will take place today. My eyes are constantly drawn away from these offices, however, distracted by the view on the left: from the first floor, one can overlook the production floor. It's a slightly overwhelming sight: hundreds of workers are sitting next to each other in rows, as far as the eye can see: the large scale makes it hard to count the number of rows, as the ones furthest away from us are barely visible, and most rows seem indistinguishable from one another. The long tables are all white, the sewing machines all look the same, and it seems that all workers in the factory are busy finishing some part of a single product: a shirt made of a red-and-black checkered fabric, pieces of which are spread across all workers, in various stages of completion. The only way to distinguish one workspace from the next is to look at the workers: the overwhelming majority of the workers are women, all of whom are dressed up in different colored and patterned outfits. Some look up from their work, watching me and the other visitors. My eyes search for male workers in the big tapestry of production, and find a few of them concentrated in areas other than tailoring: I see some grouped around large tables for cutting fabric. The offices on this floor, overlooking the production on the ground floor, are also mostly populated by men. In the afternoon, we join a few of the managers for lunch in the factory canteen. There are three illustrated posters on the wall, identical except for their language. The trainer from Swasti explains that these posters are about sexual harassment in the workplace. The wall also has signs indicating that 'ladies' should sit on one side of the canteen, and 'gents' on the other.*

*(Notes on factory visit, August 16, 2017)*

The fourteen women respondents in this study do not only have an employment sector in common, but also a socio-economic background, which has affected the range of choices available to them. The poverty that most of them grew up in shaped the future they

---

<sup>15</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

imagined for themselves, i.e., served as an 'axis of oppression' (Hill Collins 1990). Yallamma, for example, said that she did not have any particular dreams about the future, as "she didn't even have (..) proper clothes to wear".<sup>16</sup> Others, like Kalavathi, wanted to have a good education, but had to leave school sooner than they would have liked, because of their parents' limited financial resources.<sup>17</sup> In several families, health issues led to a financial crisis that made respondents adjust their plans. For example, Rani had dreamt of becoming a police officer, but when her mother became ill, the family had to spend a lot of money on her hospitalization and medicines. Rani dropped out of school after her tenth grade, and started looking for a job.<sup>18</sup> Manjula, too, knew what she wanted to be when she grew up: a doctor. However, when her brother passed away because of a heart condition, she had to drop out of school early and contribute to the family income.<sup>19</sup> Poornima was the only respondent who was already expecting to work in the garment industry while growing up: her father was a tailor, and therefore she anticipated doing the same work.<sup>20</sup> As for the others, they took on the job to earn money, and because someone (often a neighbor or a relative) told them that the factory was a good place to work at. Their choice to find employment in the garment industry can be understood as one arising out of 'passive agency' (Kabeer 2005), i.e., action taken when there is little choice to begin with. Had the women been given room to exercise more 'active agency' (Kabeer 2005), many would have preferred to end up elsewhere.

In the three garment factories where the women respondents work, there is a common pattern concerning the work that is done by women and the work that is done by men, as exemplified by the opening vignette to this section. Much of the space in each factory is taken up by rows upon rows of women working behind sewing machines. Male workers are in the minority, and are concentrated in different sections, such as the ironing and cutting sections. The two HR managers I interviewed estimated the percentage of women in the total workforce in their factories at 70 and 80 percent, respectively. However, in positions higher up the 'career ladder', the gender balance is very different. In one of the factories, there are no female supervisors, and in the other two factories, female supervisors are in the minority (11% and 40% respectively, according to the HR managers). Managerial positions such as that of HR manager and director are held almost exclusively by men. The gendered divisions of labour are thus solidified in a hierarchy, i.e., an inequality regime (Acker 2006), in which men hold a disproportionate amount of positions with relatively more decision-making power, while women hold a disproportionate amount of positions with relatively less decision-making power, given the fact that female workers are in the overwhelming majority.

---

<sup>16</sup> Interview, August 17, 2017

<sup>17</sup> Interview, August 16, 2017

<sup>18</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

<sup>19</sup> Interview, August 30, 2017

<sup>20</sup> Interview, August 16, 2017

This is conform with the 'public patriarchy' described by Walby (2000): women participate in the public arena of paid employment, but they find themselves in subordinate positions.

Reflecting on the gendered division of labor, the women respondents justified the current situation by referring to the responsibilities faced by men and women at home. Yallamma, who works at a factory without female supervisors, said that the work of a supervisor is difficult, and may require working overtime hours, which could be more difficult for women to handle.<sup>21</sup> Shilpa, who is working in a factory with a small number of female supervisors, explained that there used to be more women supervisors, but several of them had left the job after getting married.<sup>22</sup> Manjula explained that the majority of packers in her factory are male workers, because the pay scale in the packing section is higher, and men 'need to maintain the family life'.<sup>23</sup> The stereotype cited by Manjula, namely that men are responsible for maintaining their family, is especially interesting coming from a woman who is working in a factory where women workers are in the majority, some of whom are the sole breadwinners for their families. It seems that she has internalized the restrictive expectations nonetheless, which is a characteristic of patriarchal hegemony (Liddy 1995). I will return to the topic of combining work with a 'second shift' of household responsibilities, and the implications of expectations from women to be caregivers and men to be breadwinners in later sections of this chapter.

In addition to gendered differences in terms of the responsibilities at home, respondents also perceived inherent differences in the skills of male and female workers, arising from an essentialist understanding of gender (Agnew 2003). For example, several women explained that ironing was a riskier job, and that it would be difficult for a woman to deal with the excessive heat. Shanthamma, who works as a helper, said that most helpers in her factory are women, whereas men have different designations, because they can 'do more work'.<sup>24</sup> Savitha, who works as a packer, said that packing is an easy job, and that's why women were doing it.<sup>25</sup>

### 6.2.3 THE 'INEQUALITY REGIME' IN PRACTICE: HIERARCHY IN COMMUNICATION AND ARCHITECTURE

*Shanthamma, my interpreter and I are sat around a table on the premises of Shanthamma's factory for our interview with her. A man, whom we had met earlier that day when he asked my interpreter and me about our plans for lunch, enters the room, carrying a tray with three cups of tea on it. He walks up to our table and quickly puts down one cup in front of my*

---

<sup>21</sup> Interview, August 16, 2017

<sup>22</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

<sup>23</sup> Interview, August 30, 2017

<sup>24</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

<sup>25</sup> Interview, October 4, 2017

*interpreter and one in front of me, before turning around and walking out of the room with the remaining cup still on his tray. I look confused, realizing he did not think to offer Shanthamma the third cup. I take my own cup and try to resolve the situation by offering it to her, arguing that we had already been given tea anyway, but she shakes her head and tells my interpreter no. "She's saying: no, that's okay, you have it, I don't drink tea now. This is not the time for me to drink tea." (Notes on interview, August 29, 2017).*

The factories' inequality regimes, i.e., "the interlocked practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities" (Acker 2006) can be observed in the communication between workers and their superiors, as well as in the factories' physical structures. During my visits to the factories, my interpreter and I were also assigned a place in the workplace hierarchy. As the vignette above illustrates, we received preferential treatment. We were served lunch after the workers' lunch hour, or in a different room, and were given access to sanitary facilities that were exclusive to management and visitors.

The workplace hierarchy was also embedded in the factories' physical structures. Two of the factories are designed so that production takes place on the ground floor, while the managers' offices are located on the first floor, overlooking the workers. Thus, there is an inherent 'distance' between the workers and the management that is reinforced by the buildings they work in. The designs also recall the panopticon described by Foucault (1979), as the structure allows the managers to keep an eye on their workers at all times. As Foucault has argued, in a design like this, self-control and self-discipline are imposed on the people who are aware that they may be watched. "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" (Foucault 1979, 202). Thus, the power of management over the workers is communicated to them through the factory's design.

The inequality regime is also apparent in interactions between workers and their superiors, as my conversations with the women workers revealed. For example, Kalavathi indicated that she was worried about going back to work after the interview. She predicted that her superiors would check on her, asking her questions like: 'What did you tell them? What did they ask?' and she was aware that the managers wanted her to say "only good things" about the factory and the program.<sup>26</sup> An anecdote from Venila further illustrates the way in which the management's superiority is communicated to the workers:

*Venila has been working at the factory's daycare facility for the workers' children for six years. Asked how she found the job, she explained that her neighbor had been working at the factory as a tailor, and told her that the company had vacancies for the creche. She recalls a conversation with an HR representative from the factory. My interpreter told me: "[He] told her*

---

<sup>26</sup> Interview, August 16, 2017

*all the things about taking care of the children. Like: **these kids are coming from villages, and they're not clean. They're dirty kids.** You should not feel bad for that, and you should not feel unclean or something like that. You should take care of them, if you're only willing for all these thing, you can join, he said (...) She agreed for all that. (...) She says: because I had two children, I treat these children also like my own children. I never felt never something, ehm, ugly, or.. Bad, or.. Anything like that."* (Interview, October 4, 2017. Emphasis added.)

Another respondent, Sathya, said that she is determined to give her children a future in which they are treated differently than she and her colleagues are treated by the superiors in the factory. In fact, her wish is that her children can become like the factory's superiors: the people whom Sathya has to address with 'sir' or 'mister'. My interpreter explained: "She would want someone in future to call her kids also like that only. (...) She wants them to be in a better position, so that tomorrow, the next generation would call them, or address them, with that respectable [language]".<sup>27</sup> Sathya thus links subtle differences in language to tangible differences in one's societal position. Although all workers address their supervisors with the formal language described by Sathya, she was the only respondent to point this out.

### 6.3.1 THE SECOND SHIFT

In addition to their work at the garment factory (eight hours a day, six days a week), the women respondents are also contributing to unpaid labour at home in their 'second shift' (Hochschild and Machung 1990). In all of the respondents' households, women (respondents and their mother, sister(s), sister(s)-in-law, daughter(s), etc.) take up the bulk of household responsibilities. Completing all the necessary tasks in time requires careful planning and preparation from the women: they bear the the 'mental load' (Sutherland 2010) of the household.

While their work at the factory doesn't start before 8:30, half of the female respondents are up by 5:30 in the morning, to make sure they can finish all the tasks that are on their plate for the morning before leaving for work. These tasks, which can be seen as part of the 'second shift', generally include cooking breakfast and lunch for themselves and other household members, getting kids ready to go to school and doing cleaning tasks like sweeping and doing the dishes. In addition, several respondents take time to draw a 'rangoli' at the entrance of their house (see Figure 2). Two respondents, Shilpa and Nalini, said that they already started preparations for the next day's breakfast the



Figure 2: A rangoli drawing in front of the door of one of the respondent's houses. Several of the women respondents draw a rangoli each morning.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, August 17, 2017

evening before.<sup>28</sup> After work, most respondents take up cooking tasks, and several women take up additional cleaning tasks (sweeping, doing dishes, folding laundry) or caring tasks (helping kids or siblings with their homework) in the evening as well.

*During a home visit at Suguna's house, she and another woman (who left soon after) were busy in the kitchen preparing food. Suguna served us a rice dish and a small salad. Her sons were given the same food, but she and her husband didn't eat yet, because she would be preparing a separate meal for her husband, who doesn't eat rice. Suguna would only eat after her husband had finished his food. The husband praised his wife's cooking skills and her dedication to him elaborately, remarking that she would always stay up to wait for him to come home. When I asked about the husband's own cooking skills, he said that he can manage to prepare something on his own when Suguna is not home, to which she jokingly responded: "only when I'm not around, he can cook!" (Notes on home visit, August 31, 2017)*

Cooking is almost exclusively done by women, as illustrated by Suguna's story above. It is up to them to decide what the household members will be having for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and it is their responsibility to prepare the meals. During the home visits, it was always women (the respondent, her sister, sister-in-law, and/or her mother) offering me and the interpreter something to eat and drink and going to the kitchen to prepare it. Men would remain in the living room. While I did not see men contributing to cooking tasks during the home visits, several women respondents told me that their husband, father, or brother contributed to cooking tasks, for example by cutting vegetables, preparing chapatis<sup>29</sup> or fetching water from outside the house. But there are also households in which the spaces have become 'gendered' to such an extent that men would not even enter the kitchen. This recalls the physical divisions of spaces for male and female workers in Factory 1, which I described in the opening vignette to Section 6.2.2. Some of the women respondents said that male household members would always ask their sisters or their mother to get something from the kitchen for them. For example, Rani explained that she and her mother need to get up early to cook, because her cousin has to leave for work at seven in the morning.<sup>30</sup>

In Manjula's household, too, cooking was a task assigned exclusively to women. The men, her father and brother, would even ask a woman to fetch water from the kitchen for them. The women household members linked the practice of assigning household tasks to daughters, but not to sons, i.e., making gendered choices in the children's upbringing, with assumptions about the future. Learning to 'perform' one's gender well, according to the norms, has opposite implications for men and women (Butler 2009). As Manjula's family explained, girls will grow up to be wives, who have to do tasks like cooking in their future household. In-laws

---

<sup>28</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017; Interview, August 30, 2017

<sup>29</sup> A flatbread that is one of the staple food items in South India

<sup>30</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

may judge the girl's mother if they haven't taught her to do household tasks properly. Boys, on the other hand, will have a wife who will do this work for them, so there is less of a necessity for them to learn these tasks.<sup>31</sup> This line of reasoning thus refers to stereotypical expectations of female and male roles to justify existing gendered divisions of labor at home. I will return to the topic of marriage, and the responsibilities that it entails, in Section 6.4.

*"[Poornima] says in each and every thing she does, her husband will work - suppose if she's washing clothes, he will take it and put it to drain them, and if she's grooming the house, he'll put water and clean it, and if the.. And they will put the clothes outside for the dry, he will bring them back and fold it and keep it for her. If she's cooking, he will help her in cutting the vegetables, like all that" (Interview, August 16, 2017)*

If men do contribute to household work, they generally play a supporting role, while women coordinate and initiate the activities. As the quote above shows, Poornima initiates each task, while her husband assists her. The 'mental load' (Sutherland 2010) to keep track of when the laundry, cleaning and cooking needs to happen is on her. About half of the respondents gave examples of male household members contributing to household work - some of them said that it was only after taking part in the Women in Factories program that they were able to convince men in the household to help them. Regarding the task division, their stories showed the same pattern that arises from Poornima's story.

### **6.3.2 MANAGING FINANCES**

All of the women respondents make a significant contribution to their family's income, and most of them are involved in decisions on how it is spent as well. Two of the women respondents are the only household members doing paid work. In all other households, several household members earn an income. Semi-structured interviews revealed that different households have different arrangements, but a woman is always involved, and often in charge, in managing the finances. Most respondents said that the financial decisions were made collectively. It is common practice to take a moment every month to review the upcoming expenses and set spending priorities together, as a married couple or as a family. There are also a few women who manage the household finances by themselves, deciding how to spend their own earnings and those of other household members (including the men's income). Finally, three women respondents said that they hand over the responsibility for financial decisions to their mother. For example, Kalavathi said that she did not have the time and energy to think about financial decisions. She doesn't want to "break [her] head" over those kinds of decisions, and hands her salary over to her mother, leaving her to manage the household budget.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Notes on home visit, September 1, 2017

<sup>32</sup> Interview, August 16, 2017

Kalavathi's stance on the managing of finances as something that consumes too much energy and time illustrates a sentiment voiced by several respondents. While involvement in financial decisions can be seen as a form of power (to allocate resources), some of the women mainly considered it to be a chore. The training manual for the advanced part of the Women in Factories program hinted at this as well, as I showed in the preceding chapter.<sup>33</sup> It requires careful budgeting to pay all the necessary expenses, including rent, food, and schooling. For both Kalavathi and Venila, who are the only ones in their households doing paid work, it is a real struggle to make ends meet, and to take care of the family members who depend on them. This leaves them no room for any savings. At her home, Venila explained that the food that she buys for her sons, her mother and herself is usually limited to the cheapest available ingredients. With her salary and her mother's pension, she has to pay everything from school fees to rent to food, which means that they often eat the same kinds of food, leading her sons to grumble: 'The food is the same every time, why, mama?'. They can only afford more luxury food items, such as chicken, about four times a year for special occasions.<sup>34</sup>

Although all respondents initially indicated that women are involved in all financial decisions at home, several stories hint at male household members shirking collective budgeting responsibility. Savitha's story below is one example.

*Savitha is living with her parents. All three household members are doing paid work. The household tasks also used to be a shared responsibility among all household members.*

*Savitha's father used to help with the laundry, for example. Lately, however, he has been having trouble with his hand, which has become partially numb. His doctor has told him that he should stop drinking liquor, which is something he does daily. Savitha and her mother spend their salary on household expenses, such as groceries, and save some money in a chit fund.<sup>35</sup> The mother is also saving up for Savitha's marriage. Savitha hands over all of her earnings to her mother, and if she needs something, her mother will provide her with the amount that she requires. Her father, on the other hand, keeps the money he needs for his own expenses, and then contributes the remaining sum to the family expenses. (Interview, October 4, 2017)*

---

<sup>33</sup> The manual stated that worries over money are a common source of stress among poor people, and that "it is difficult to live on a small income". Therefore, it is important to "plan carefully" (CARE 2012b).

<sup>34</sup> Notes on home visit, October 8, 2017

<sup>35</sup> A chit fund is a savings scheme with a group of members, who each contribute money in periodical instalments



## 6.4 EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AROUND MARRIAGE

Young, unmarried women are seen as just that by society: yet to get married. It is considered self-evident that they have to get married in time, to an appropriate husband, and that, once married, they will behave in accordance with the wishes of the future husband and his family.

There is an age limit to being single as a woman. Four of the women I interviewed were single. Their ages ranged from 21 to 29, and each of them expected that they would get married within the next few years, as their family was getting increasingly impatient. Although there is some variation in the specifics, many respondents and their family members indicated that there is an age limit to being single as a woman, which they generally placed around the woman's early to mid-twenties. They also agreed that the age limit for women is much more restrictive than for men, i.e. a man not having married by his late twenties is not considered problematic. This difference in expectations shows how two systems of oppression, namely age and gender, interact within the matrix of domination (Hill Collins 1990), to create diverging experiences for men and women in their twenties. They may have their age in common, but their gender affects what this age means for the roles they are expected to fulfil.

When I visited Shilpa at home, my interpreter and I spoke with her elder sister, who was already married. She had gotten married to her husband when she was 21 years old, and felt that Shilpa, now 23, should be married before the age of 25. She explained that women have to make sure that they get children in time, for two reasons: first, because they should not be too old to take care of babies, and second, because by the time the women cannot work anymore, their children should be old enough to take care of their parents.<sup>36</sup> She was the only one to explain the age limit based on these practical considerations.

Another justification for young women having to hurry up with their marriage is the pressure from people outside the immediate family. Different respondents and their family members told me about relatives who would continuously ask a mother why her daughter is not married yet, causing her to feel pressured, even if she herself doesn't think her daughter needs to be married yet. Nalini, who has two teenage daughters, listened as her eldest explained to my interpreter and me that society will look badly upon women if they haven't gotten married by the age of 25. Then she told her daughter not to bother about 'society', arguing that you cannot please everybody, and people will always talk.<sup>37</sup> However, most respondents and their family members struggle to shrug off the outside pressure so easily. For example, while Manjula's elder sister told her not to get married for society, as life is not just about marriage, their mother felt that her daughter 'shouldn't give people a reason to

---

<sup>36</sup> Notes on home visit, August 30, 2017

<sup>37</sup> Notes on home visit, August 31, 2017

talk [i.e., gossip]' and get married.<sup>38</sup> Savitha's sister also said that she had gotten married sooner than she would have liked, because relatives kept asking her mother why she wasn't married yet. Her mother then gave in and started searching for a suitable husband.<sup>39</sup> The outside pressure illustrates the 'punishments' that are initiated when a woman performs her gender "wrong" (Butler 1988), i.e. when she fails to get married in time, according to the unwritten rules.

A final line of reasoning to justify an age limit, which was mentioned in several different conversations during home visits, came down to the idea that 'boys choose girls', and girls cannot choose boys. Young women do not have as much 'active agency' (Kabeer 2005) as young men do in decision-making about their future. Therefore, they have a duty to make an effort to be attractive to potential suitors. As women get older, they become less attractive as marriage candidates and it becomes more difficult to find a suitable husband. Manjula, who is now 29 years old, said that countless people had visited her at home to assess her potential as a marriage candidate. "I can't even count, there have been so many people".<sup>40</sup> She and her family have gotten used to the recurrent pattern of receiving these visitors and then never hearing from them again. Some people have told Manjula's family that they do not find her attractive enough:

*"Because she's [a] little fat, they decided: okay, I don't want [to get married to her]. So that's why now the mother is insisting her to go to gym, work out, and reduce. But [Manjula] says: for someone else, why do I have to, like, you know, work out and all that? If they want to get married, let them accept me as I am. Otherwise, let them go."* (Interview, September 24, 2017)

Marriage is a costly event for women and their family. As Manjula's sister explained in a conversation at Manjula's parental home, marriage is like a 'business', due to the practice of dowry associated with it. On the market for marriage candidates, young, slim, fair girls, i.e., those whose appearances are closest to stereotypical ideals of feminine beauty, will get married sooner, and no dowry is required for their marriage. However, less physically attractive and older women will cost their family an amount of dowry. Manjula's sister estimated that it would take about 10 lakhs (a million rupees<sup>41</sup>) for her 29-year-old sibling to get married.<sup>42</sup>

A wedding generally requires a significant sum of money from the bride's family. The respondents and their family members referred to this multiple times. For example, Shilpa,

---

<sup>38</sup> Notes on home visit, September 1, 2017

<sup>39</sup> Notes on home visit, October 8, 2017

<sup>40</sup> Interview, September 24, 2017

<sup>41</sup> 1 million rupees is about €13,000, based on the exchange rate from xe.com, retrieved on December 28, 2017

<sup>42</sup> Notes on home visit, September 1, 2017

now 23 years old, said that she would probably get married in two years. I asked her why it would take two years, and she said that she first needed to save more money.<sup>43</sup> Her colleague Rani told me that her sister had recently gotten married, and the family had borrowed money for the wedding. As soon as the debts were cleared, her family would set up the wedding for her.<sup>44</sup> This financial burden associated with a daughter's wedding shows another way in which gender interacts with socio-economic status within the matrix of domination.

Once married, a woman will face expectations from her husband and his family with respect to the tasks that she will fulfil as a wife. In some cases, this means that the woman is confined to the private sphere, which recalls Walby's (1990) private patriarchy. The story of Manjula in the previous section also hinted at wives being judged by their in-laws at their ability to perform household tasks. Manjula's colleague Rani told me that she was not looking forward to getting married, because her husband might not allow his wife to work. When I asked her about her female colleagues who were already married, my interpreter explained:

*"She's saying the people who are married here and working, no? They have very good understanding between husband and wife. That's nice if there is such equality with everybody, so.. But not everyone will have the same opportunity. But she prefers if there is something like that, that they can be independent if they work after marriage."* (Interview, August 29, 2017).

Asked if she had shared her worries about the future with her mother or sister, Rani explained that her mother and sister leave her future to fate, telling her: "If they [your future husband and his family] let you work, you work. Otherwise, whatever is written in your fate, that will happen."<sup>45</sup> In a conversation with Rani's mother during a home visit, she repeated the same sentiment.

When Suguna was growing up, women were not supposed to do work outside of the home, which was linked to a sense of responsibility that her father felt to provide for the family:

*Suguna describes her father as a dignified man, who worked very hard to earn money for his family, ensuring that he never needed to ask anyone for support. He did not want Suguna's mother to struggle and do paid work. However, because the financial situation of the family was difficult, her mother still wanted to contribute. Without telling her husband, Suguna's mother got a job as a maid. She would always be back home before her husband, so he never found out. Suguna and her elder sister also took a job when they were in seventh or eighth grade, working as a maid, so that they could afford to buy nice clothes for themselves and contribute to the school fees. The two sisters shared a job: each of them went to the same*

---

<sup>43</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

<sup>44</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

<sup>45</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

*house after school on alternate days: if Suguna went there on Monday, her sister would be there on Tuesday, and so on. They also kept this work a secret from their father. Once Suguna's elder brother got a full-time job, the sisters stopped working.* (Interview, September 23, 2017)

The stereotypical division between men as breadwinners and women as caregivers seems to be persistent. When my interpreter and I discussed the topic of marriage with Shilpa and her family members, Shilpa's fourteen-year-old cousin Suresh said that he was already anticipating his sister's wedding. He was planning to save money for this occasion, given that he is the only son in their family. As he explained: 'Who else will take care of her?'.<sup>46</sup> When I suggested that his sister may be able to afford her own wedding, he said that it's not right to take that much money from a girl.

While marriage is considered to be important for young women, not all marriages are valued equally. Weddings are supposed to be a 'family affair', rather than an individual affair. A love marriage, in which the bride and groom choose each other out of love, is therefore not considered a reason for celebration, as it often causes conflicts between the two families, who did not choose to be involved with each other. When I visited Manjula's home, her sister told us that her marriage is a love marriage. I wanted to ask Manjula if this was something that she would like as well, but my interpreter gently suggested that would not be a good idea. She expected that Manjula's mother, who was also in the room, might get offended, or suspect that we were trying to convince her younger daughter to get a love marriage as well, which would come across as inconsiderate.<sup>47</sup> In a subsequent interview, Manjula shared that her sister's love marriage had initially caused a lot of unrest in the bride's and groom's families. The groom's family felt that their son should marry someone with a better socio-economic status.<sup>48</sup> Another respondent, Venila, told us that her mother was living with her, and treated her better than her sisters, because she was the only daughter who did not have a love marriage. "I didn't want to give that worriedness [about a love marriage] to my parents, so that's the reason my father searched for me", she explained.<sup>49</sup>

Another question that my interpreter kept me from asking concerned getting remarried. Two respondents had been left by their husband for another woman. When we visited one of them at her home, I wanted to ask her if she would ever want to get remarried. My interpreter quickly warned me that this was inappropriate: while men can leave their wife for another woman, it is inappropriate for women to remarry. Furthermore, if a woman does choose to remarry, her second husband may refuse to take responsibility for her children. Thus, this puts additional pressure on the woman's family to find a good husband, as there is

---

<sup>46</sup> Notes on home visit, August 30, 2017

<sup>47</sup> Notes on home visit, September 1, 2017

<sup>48</sup> Interview, September 24, 2017

<sup>49</sup> Interview, October 4, 2017

no 'second chance' for her. This is yet another example of the way in which dominant societal - patriarchal - norms deny women the same freedom that men are allowed.

## 6.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have described how gendered divisions of labor play a role in the women respondent's everyday interactions at work and at home. I have also shown how their socio-economic status and age play a role as additional identity markers that interact with gender in a matrix of domination. This matrix can be understood as a structure that determines the range of choices that individuals can make using their agency.

Stereotypes about male and female qualities, which are based on an essentialist notion of gender, are used to justify the gendered divisions of labor at work and at home. Even though the women respondents participated in an empowerment program that aims to teach workers about challenging gender stereotypes, these stereotypes still affect how the women perceive the world around them. The women respondents and their relatives reveal expectations of men to be breadwinners, and women to be caregivers. To some extent, reality defies these stereotypes, as some of the women respondents are actually the sole breadwinners in their families, and men also perform caring tasks in some of the households. It seems that the respondents have internalized these stereotypes nonetheless.

The phenomenon of subordinated individuals internalizing dominant ideas has been described as ideological hegemony (Mahutga and Stepan-Norris 2015), or, with respect to the ideology of patriarchy, patriarchal hegemony (Liddy 1995). According to the theory of ideological - and patriarchal - hegemony, the internalization of dominant ideas induces consent to unequal relationships of power. In other words, if an individual has internalized the idea that men are supposed to be breadwinners, she is likely to accept a structure in which men are assigned positions that are better paid.

Butler (2000) observes a parallel with the theory of hegemonic power and her theory of performativity, given that both allow for "new social possibilities" to emerge. Following her theory, the fact that more women are working may bring about a "remaking of gendered reality" (Butler 2009, i) within their social circle, because their actions are challenging the norms for feminine behavior. Even though their choice to work in the garment industry was made in a situation with limited agency, a remaking of gendered reality based on their actions might lead to a situation with more 'active agency' (Kabeer 2005) for other women.

In the next chapter, I will turn to the way the women respondents envision the future of their personal and working lives, also investigating the extent to which they recognize "the ideology that legitimizes male domination", an essential part of 'liberating empowerment' as described by Sardenberg (2008, 19).

## 7. Envisioning the future: power to and power from within

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I examine the extent to which women are able to exercise 'power from within' and 'power to' (Sharp et al. 2006) with respect to the matrix of domination that was described in the previous chapter. The Women in Factories program that the respondents participated in aimed at "[empowering] women to advocate for themselves" (Walmart 2013), and the advanced part of this program was set up to "[prepare] women to take on greater leadership responsibilities within factories" (CARE 2012b). 'Power from within' and 'power to' (Sharp et al. 2006) are key in achieving these goals.

In the context of this research, power from within, i.e. the challenging of self-perceptions, entails that the women respondents envision alternative ways of 'doing gender' and that they can see themselves advancing in their career. Sardenberg (2008) pointed out that liberating empowerment requires a recognition of "the ideology that legitimizes male domination", and an understanding of how this perpetuates oppression, i.e., power from within. Power to, on the other hand, is about the ability to act, i.e., being able to turn one's visions into reality (Sharp et al. 2006). An examination of the respondents' power from within and power to thus requires the consideration of two questions: first, how they envision their future (and to what extent this future is based on changes to the current situation), and second, to what extent they see possibilities to turn this vision into a reality.

The chapter is structured as follows. I first describe how the women reflect on the gendered expectations that they face. Some of them have made conscious decisions about the way in which they want to raise their children with respect to gender roles. Then, I consider the respondents' visions of the future, and the extent to which they anticipate changes in their career. It becomes clear that most respondents are focusing on long-term change, hoping that their children will have better and economically more prosperous lives than their mothers. Finally, the story of one respondent who did develop a clear ambition for her personal career shows that, even if she has considerable 'power from within', limiting structures at the workplace indicate a lack of 'power to' turn this ambition into reality.

## 7.2 'I CAN BE LIKE A MAN': REFLECTING ON GENDER ROLES AND ANTICIPATING CHANGE

*Venila lives with her two sons and her mother, having lost her husband to an accident when her youngest son was just a baby. Reflecting on her participation in the Women in Factories program, Venila told my interpreter and me that she always used to worry about there not being a man at home. She was wondering what she would do with her future. However, she has since developed more confidence and now says that she "can also become like a man", knowing that she is not less than a man and can lead her life without a man. "I'm doing all [men's] work. (...) What a man has to do in the house, I'm doing it. I'm doing everything". Now, she is determined to give her children a good upbringing so that they can stand on their own feet in the future. (Interview, October 4, 2017)*

Venila's story illustrates a change in consciousness with respect to gender, i.e. "power from within": her self-image and understanding of gender has undergone a change, so that she no longer defines herself in terms of lacking a husband, but instead recognizes that she has taken up the tasks society may expect from a husband. As I remarked in the previous chapter, the performative nature of gender reality means that actions of individual agents that deviate from the gender norm open up the possibility to remake gendered reality (Butler 2009). The fact that Venila has had to take up responsibilities that she considers to be 'men's responsibilities' may therefore lead those around her to develop a broader definition of feminine behavior. However, Venila is still defining her behavior as masculine, even though she is a woman. In other words, she has internalized essentialist gender norms to such an extent that they still determine how she reflects on her own behavior. In the previous chapter, I showed that this internalization of gender stereotypes can be considered a component of the patriarchal hegemony (Liddy 1995).

Manjula's story also shows a way in which acting counter to existing gender norms can remake gendered reality. When she was growing up, she and her sister were given more household tasks than their brothers. "He's a boy (...), you cook for him", their parents would tell them. They did not want their daughters to do paid work, as they believed women were supposed to spend their time on household tasks, conform the division between men as breadwinners and women as caregivers that was described in Chapter 6. However, given the family's financial situation, after her brother passed away, they realized it would be helpful if Manjula could earn some money as well. Their relatives heard about Manjula's positive experience and have started to allow their daughters to get a job too. She also knows colleagues in the factory who were the first girls in their families to do paid work. If women repeatedly use their agency to counter the societal expectations attached to feminine behavior, this "gendered reality" can be remade along new lines (Butler 2009), in which acceptable feminine behavior can also include doing paid work.

Participation in the Women in Factories also led some of the respondents to start thinking about gender differently. Manjula said that, once she has children of her own, she wants to make sure that boys and girls are treated equally and that they learn about gender equality. Manjula expects that she will have no more than one or two kids, so that she and her husband can afford to give them a good education. Asked if she expects her future husband to accept her wish to have a small family, she said "I will make him understand, and I will make him learn why the family planning has to be done".<sup>50</sup> This quote shows Manjula's power from within, i.e. that she considers herself to be a 'capable agent of change' (Sharp et al. 2006), when it comes to raising children. Several other respondents said that they are raising their children differently than they have been raised themselves when it comes to gender. Nalini described this change as follows:

*"She's saying: my husband's generation, ehm, the parents were not teaching their sons to help their wives, or the daughters, or the sisters, like that. So now we have to actually teach boys also to help their siblings, or the mother (...), and respect them equally."* (Interview, August 30, 2017)

Nalini's description shows that she is aware of the impact of unequal treatment of sons and daughters, and that she wants to change what kids are taught about the responsibilities that they have towards others. This can be seen as an example of 'power from within'.

During a home visit at Kalavathi's place, I asked her if she had ever tried to teach her son cooking skills. She started laughing. My interpreter explained that he would not even get water from the kitchen, preferring his mother or grandmother to do everything for him. According to Kalavathi's mother, the gendered task division in which men do not take up any household tasks and women are expected to do everything is always passed on from one generation to the next. She was brought up that way, she taught her daughter the same thing, and Kalavathi's son was also raised according to these gender norms. Asked if they expected this to change in the future, Kalavathi and her mother said that perhaps it would be different in the future. They did not see a role for themselves in this process.<sup>51</sup> Thus, even though they recognize the structure that leads men and women to be socialized into different roles, Kalavathi and her mother take this as a given.

### 7.3 ENVISIONING THE FUTURE: 'ALL ABOUT THE KIDS'

*Munirathna observed that "so far they haven't given that opportunity, for a [woman] to work as a supervisor" at her factory. She did not know why. "She says she just comes in the morning, she finish all her work and just go, she doesn't know anything about that." Although she feels*

---

<sup>50</sup> Interview, August 30, 2017

<sup>51</sup> Notes on home visit, August 20, 2017.



*like a woman could be a supervisor, and it would be good if a woman worker were given this opportunity, Munirathna does not want to become a supervisor herself. "She can't concentrate on both her personal life and here [at the factory]". (Interview, August 17, 2017)*

Thinking about the future of their working lives, most women expect that they will continue doing the same work for the foreseeable future.<sup>52</sup> Most are not expecting to advance to a higher position, and some, like Munirathna, quoted above, say that they don't want to. Several respondents showed a passive attitude towards career advancement when I asked them about becoming a supervisor. They implied that they might be up for the job if their management asked them to take it up, but would not ever ask for an opportunity themselves. Savitha's story illustrates this:

*Asked if she thinks she could be a supervisor, Savitha said that she knows that she could, and that she has the capacity. But she left it up to her superiors to notice her quality and give her the job. I suggested that she could ask the superiors to consider her for the position, but she did not want to do so. She said that they should give her the job out of their own initiative, and she did not like to go and ask for it, because "the job should come searching her" and not the other way around. (Interview, October 4, 2017)*

Savitha thus does not perceive herself as having much agency over her position in the workplace. The same goes for Kalavathi, who said that she would want to "come forward in life", but did not see any options for herself, given that she had not completed any formal education. She has never asked anyone from the factory management about options for career advancement, assuming that there would not be any opportunities for her<sup>53</sup>. Later, talking about communication in the workplace, she echoed Munirathna's summary of the working day: "I come here, I work, they pay money, that's enough". This point of view does not reveal any 'power from within', i.e. an awareness of oppressive structures and the confidence that the individual can change this (Sardenberg 2008). In fact, for most respondents, a lack of opportunities for women in the workplace is not something that they experience as oppressive, given that they do not see themselves as valid candidates for career advancement.

The fact that the respondents are working in factories where female supervisors are a minority may also affect the extent to which they develop ambitions to become a supervisor themselves. Lockwood (2006) has described the dynamic that causes this using the concept of 'proxies'. People tend to compare themselves to people similar to them to evaluate their own ability to perform a task. These similar others serve as 'proxies'. "A successful female may be a useful proxy for determining [women's] own potential for future success." (Ibid.)

---

<sup>52</sup> In most semi-structured interviews with the women respondents, I asked: 'Do you expect that you will still be working at [Factory name] five years from now?'

<sup>53</sup> Interview, August 16, 2017

Furthermore, Lockwood theorized that female role models may alleviate the so-called 'stereotype threat', i.e. the detrimental effect of undermining stereotypes on women's actual performance.

While most respondents expected to be working the same job at the same factory for the foreseeable future, some envisioned themselves elsewhere. First of all, as I described in the previous chapter, the four single women did not know whether they would be able and/or allowed to continue their work at the factory after getting married. Secondly, among the remaining respondents, some had plans to set up other means of subsistence. Poornima's story is one example of this.

*In addition to her work as a tailor, Poornima has set up a small business of her own. She stitches adornments onto saris at home and sells the finished saris to colleagues and other acquaintances. Together with her husband, she also grows vegetables on a plot of land near their house, and sells a portion of the produce for extra income. Poornima still considers her factory job the most important and reliable source of income.* (Notes on home visit, August 20, 2017)

Poornima's colleague Sathya, who has been working at the factory as a checker, said that she would like to try and become a tailor in the next five years. This position would be better paid, and Sathya could do tailoring work from home as well.<sup>54</sup> Shanthamma expected to work at the factory for five more years to earn. Later, she would want to move back to her home village with her husband, and open up a small shop using her savings.<sup>55</sup> Nalini had a similar plan, although it is less clearly defined as of yet. She expected that her daughters may end up living in her home village, and in that case she would also move back there and invest her savings in a small shop. But if her kids find work in Bangalore, she will stay in the city too.<sup>56</sup>

*Gomathi grew up with four sisters and one brother. Their family was poor, and her parents could not afford to give their kids a good education. Instead, the daughters got married at an early age, and Gomathi had her first child when she was only fifteen years old. Thinking about the future, she is determined to give her children a better life. "Whatever she dreamt of becoming, (...) she's now working hard so that at least her kids will enjoy that life", my interpreter summarized.* (Interview, August 16, 2017)

For respondents who have children of their own<sup>57</sup>, dreams for the future are largely focused around the next generation. Gomathi's story is one example of this. Several respondents

---

<sup>54</sup> Interview, August 17, 2017

<sup>55</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

<sup>56</sup> Interview, August 30, 2017

<sup>57</sup> Ten out of fourteen women respondents have children.

echoed the same sentiment, namely, that although they are not living a very comfortable life themselves, they feel like their hard work will be worth it if their kids will have better opportunities in the future. As Suguna summarized, her future is "all about the kids".<sup>58</sup>

It seems that the women envision themselves as a kind of bridge between generations - none of the respondents wants her children to do the same kind of work as their mother. The women respondents do this work to create a situation in which their kids have more 'power to' make choices that their mothers were not able to make for themselves. Sathya, whom I quoted in the previous chapter about having to call her superiors in the factory 'sir' and 'mister', said so explicitly, namely that "she wants to see her kids in a better position in life (...) [and does not want them to] be a daily wage worker like them [Sathya and her husband]".<sup>59</sup>

During a home visit, discussing role models, Nalini recalled a neighbor of hers who used to work at the same garment factory. The neighbor's daughter could pursue an education despite her family's financial struggles, and now she is working as a software engineer and is supporting her parents financially, helping to build a new house for them. Nalini hopes she can give her kids the same kind of future.<sup>60</sup> "The only important thing is education, she says. (...) She wants them to get into a good job." (Interview, August 30, 2017)

## 7.4 AMBITIONS WITHIN LIMITING STRUCTURES

Manjula's story is an exception to the general pattern in which the respondents project most of their dreams onto the future of their children, while they do not expect much in the way of career advancement for themselves. Manjula has taken part in the advanced part of the Women in Factories program, which helped her to become more confident in communication with colleagues and her superiors at the factory. She told my interpreter and me that she is always looking out for her co-workers, and making sure that issues that occur on the workplace are reported to the relevant people. For example, if a colleague tells her that their sewing machine is not working, Manjula will tell the colleague to continue working on her machine, while she goes to find someone who can fix her colleague's defective machine.

*"She says before she took up the training from Swasti, she (...) had this stage fear, to go approach people, but after that, she started feeling like: [everyone is] coming here to earn only, then why get scared of the higher-ups? So in case if they need anything, they are here to help, so.. That's why [she does not] mind going and seeking their help".* (Interview, August 30, 2017).

---

<sup>58</sup> Interview, September 23, 2017

<sup>59</sup> Interview, August 17, 2017

<sup>60</sup> Notes on home visit, August 31, 2017

In addition to being a motivated worker, Manjula told us that she is also trying to teach her colleagues basic English skills, and that she is part of the factory's workers' committee, for which she attends biweekly meetings with the factory's welfare officer to report issues that she and her colleagues have noticed on the workplace. Asked about her future, Manjula first said that her family is looking for a husband for her, and that she will probably get married soon. I highlighted this part of her story in Chapter 6. Then, she revealed that she was trying to become a supervisor at her factory. While I discussed the possibility of advancing to a supervisory role with most respondents, Manjula was the only one to bring it up unprompted.

Manjula is convinced that she has the skills necessary to become a supervisor. She told us that if she were to go to a different factory to apply as a supervisor, they would probably give her this opportunity, because of her extensive experience and capabilities. However, at her current factory, her ambitions have been met with reluctance. Although her coworkers have recommended her to their higher-ups, the hiring process is stacked against her. According to Manjula, all of the current supervisors are 'external people', i.e. they did not start out in lower positions at the factory, but were hired directly as supervisors. "It is very difficult to become a supervisor, when I am already a tailor here", she said.<sup>61</sup> Her colleague Suguna told us the same: "to become supervisor is very difficult [here], because they always bring an external person to become a supervisor".<sup>62</sup> Suguna explained that since she is a very productive tailor, it would be difficult to replace her with someone who can reach the same level of productivity if she were promoted to a supervisory position.<sup>63</sup>

Manjula has also tried applying for other jobs at the factory, such as computer operator or welfare officer. "[B]ut they haven't considered it seriously, they say: (...) you have been working as a tailor, no? Why do you want to jump into [an]other domain? (...) [T]hey take her for granted, because she has been working in this domain only. So they still want her to work as a tailor only."<sup>64</sup>

An HR representative from Manjula's factory denied the mechanism observed by Manjula and Suguna. He said that the factory management prefers to give current employees an internal promotion, and that they would first look for suitable people in their workforce if a post opens up. "If it is not suitable, then we'll go for an outsider".<sup>65</sup> Thus, there is a clear difference in the HR representative's perception of his factory's hiring process and the way in which colleagues Manjula and Suguna experience it.

---

<sup>61</sup> Interview, August 30, 2017

<sup>62</sup> Interview, August 30, 2017

<sup>63</sup> Notes on home visit, August 31, 2017

<sup>64</sup> Interview, August 30, 2017

<sup>65</sup> Interview, September 20, 2017

During a visit to Manjula's home, we discussed the same topic with Manjula and her mother and sister, returning to the point of trying to find work at a different factory. Manjula reiterated that this could improve her chances of becoming a supervisor and increasing her earnings. However, her mother disapproved, arguing that Manjula would get married soon, and she would not be working once married. For Manjula to quit her current job and look for another one seemed like too much of a hassle to her, given her daughter's forthcoming wedding.<sup>66</sup> Manjula also took this aspect of her future as a given. Thus, in addition to the limitations that Manjula perceives at her workplace, the expectations that she faces at home are also discouraging her from realizing her ambitions.

One of Manjula's colleagues, Rani, said that she could also see herself becoming a supervisor. She was motivated because "they [supervisors] can lead a better life. They will earn better money".<sup>67</sup> In response to her inquiry about becoming a supervisors, superiors had told her that "you need to really put a lot of efforts, and you need to prove yourself, that you are capable to do more things, then you can become a supervisor." Rani said that she still had some technical skills to learn before being able to advance to the supervisory position, and she was not sure whether she would be given the opportunity before leaving the factory to get married within the next two years. She did not bring up the limit that Manjula and Suguna had brought up, with respect to the factory's hiring practices. However, similarly to Manjula, Rani's mother was also sceptical about her daughter's ambitions. Rani's mother had worked as a supervisor at a garment factory herself. During a home visit she told us that she does not think the job would suit her daughter, because Rani is not bold enough. Reflecting on her own experience, Rani's mother said that it had been difficult to combine longer working hours with household responsibilities, which she was expected to fulfil because of her gender. Some days, she would go to work very early in the morning to finish up work from the previous day. Thinking about the future of her kids, Rani's mother was mostly focused on her daughter getting married to a suitable husband.<sup>68</sup>

Conversations with two HR managers revealed different visions for the future of their workforce. In the factory where Manjula works, and where around 11% of the supervisors are women, the HR manager said that the share of female supervisors "can be increased", but he did not have a specific target in mind that the factory wanted to achieve (e.g. moving towards an equal ratio of female/male supervisors).<sup>69</sup> The other HR manager, whose factory already has a higher share of female supervisors (40% of the supervisors are women), said that their plan was to turn the current share around, i.e. going from 40% women supervisors to 40% men supervisors in the future.<sup>70</sup> Both HR managers agreed about an advantage to

---

<sup>66</sup> Notes on home visit, September 1, 2017

<sup>67</sup> Interview, August 29, 2017

<sup>68</sup> Notes on home visit, August 30, 2017

<sup>69</sup> Interview, September 20, 2017

<sup>70</sup> Interview, October 4, 2017

having female supervisors, namely that they understand 'women's problems'. One of them explained: "women are more empathic compared to men", before turning to Sathish from Swasti, the only other man in the room, to jokingly say: "sorry!".<sup>71</sup> Their explanations reveal an essentialist understanding of gender, which does not assign the same qualities to male and female workers. This may impact upon the opportunities that male and female workers are offered, and thus, the extent to which they have 'power to' (Sharp et al. 2003).

## 7.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have described what the women respondents expect from their future, and what this says about their 'power from within' and 'power to' in the context of empowerment as described by Sharp et al. (2003). Although the previous chapter showed that respondents face significant pressure from relatives to act in accordance to gender norms (e.g. to get married in time, to be a good wife to their husband), which may limit their 'power to', several respondents are determined to raise their children with different norms, i.e., they have 'power from within' to acknowledge how strict divisions between gender roles are oppressive for women. Turning to the women's working lives, most respondents do not see a role for themselves in challenging the current gendered divisions of labor at their factories. Instead, they focus on improving the future opportunities for their children, working hard to give them a better education and more 'power to' in their future.

The women's opportunities to make a career and take on jobs at their factories that have thus far been assigned to men are determined by the hiring practices of their workplace. Conversations with two HR managers revealed different approaches to these practices. Furthermore, although their factories participated in the Women in Factories program, which promotes an understanding of gender as a social construct, the HR managers' comments on women supervisors revealed an essentialist notion of gender. They still assume that male and female workers have fundamentally different qualities and talents, which may limit the freedom, or 'active agency' (Kabeer 2005) for all workers to act in ways that defy the stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity, or to 'perform one's gender wrong' (Butler 1988).

The findings of this chapter illustrate a tension between 'power from within' and 'power to'. Individual agents may develop different ways of thinking about themselves and their plans for the future, but it remains difficult to subvert the structures that have limited their choices thus far. This shows that both types of power are necessary for empowerment to become liberating (Sardenberg 2008).

---

<sup>71</sup> Interview, October 4, 2017

## 8. Conclusion

The research central to this thesis set out to examine how participants of the brand-sponsored empowerment program 'Women in Factories' experience and perform gender roles in their everyday interactions, and how they envision their future.

I examined the Women in Factories program and its approach to empowerment. The analysis revealed that this empowerment initiative, which was developed in a context of increasing attention for the corporate social responsibility strategies of major garment brands and retailers, is closely aligned to what Sardenberg (2008) has called the 'liberal empowerment' approach. In this approach, the women workers' empowerment is instrumentalized (Nazneen et al. 2014) as a means to reach business goals, including the creation of a more productive and obedient workforce. Furthermore, the individuals targeted by the liberal empowerment initiative are encouraged to take responsibility for solving their own problems using their agency. The program normalizes the structures that have been limiting the participants' agency in the first place. Empowerment programs that recognize the structures that perpetuate problems faced by all women garment workers are more closely aligned to 'liberal empowerment' (Sardenberg 2008).

Turning to the experiences of the women workers who participated in the Women in Factories program, it became clear that gender, together with age and socio-economic status, interact with each other in a matrix of domination (Hill Collins 1990) that acts as a limiting structure for the respondents. Both at the workplace and in the home, the women and their coworkers and family members interact according to gendered divisions of labor. They are expected to 'perform' their gender according to the existing norms (Butler 1988). Reflections from the respondents and their family members on these gendered task divisions reveal an essentialist understanding of gender that has become internalized. Even though the respondents' own actions sometimes contradict the gender stereotypes that they describe, these stereotypes are still affecting how they understand their everyday reality. The internalization of the dominant ideas inherent to a patriarchal society can be understood as patriarchal hegemony (Liddy 1995), in which subordinated people consent to unequal power relations, because they believe these are justified based on the dominant stereotypes.

Regarding the women respondents' visions for their future, the way in which they reflect on past and current gender norms at home shows that many respondents have the 'power from within' (Sharp et al. 2003) to recognize the oppressive nature of these gender norms and to develop a determination to change these norms. Reflections on the gendered divisions of labor at their workplace, on the other hand, show that this 'power from within' does not extend to career ambitions for most of the respondents. It also seems that their 'power to' (ibid.) achieve career advancement within the garment factories is limited, given that they depend on their superiors to grant them the opportunity to do so. In this context, the

women's dreams for the future are mostly centered around the next generation. Although most of the respondents did not purposefully choose to work in the garment industry, they are working hard to create a situation with more 'active agency' (i.e. room for purposeful behavior) for their children (Kabeer 2005).

The findings presented in this thesis contribute to an understanding of the limits to agency within liberal empowerment (Sardenberg 2008). The relationship between liberal empowerment and agency is paradoxical: it is not in the interest of a liberal empowerment program to bring about changes to the structures that have limited the participants' 'active agency' (Kabeer 2005), but at the same time, the liberal approach to empowerment conceptualizes individual agency as the key to engendering empowerment.

The findings also illustrate the importance of taking power inequalities into consideration when conceptualizing gender performativity and the agency in this process. Although individuals may behave in ways that defy stereotypical divisions between feminine and masculine behavior, whether this can contribute to an 'undoing' or 'redoing' of the norms (Butler 1988) also depends on their position in society, and the extent to which the social context around them accepts their actions. The persistence of internalized gender stereotypes provides continued support to the patriarchal hegemony (Liddy 1995) in which the possibilities for women's 'active agency' (Kabeer 2005) within gender performativity are limited.

To bring about 'liberating empowerment' (Sardenberg 2008) requires critical engagement with the structures that perpetuate problems faced by all individuals targeted by an empowerment intervention. Given the significant power held by global garment brands and retailers in the supply chain, their potential to contribute to structural changes with respect to the 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins 1990) that women garment workers in South India are dealing with extends far beyond the provision of a liberal, technical skills training. For example, they could put pressure on their suppliers to implement hiring practices that aim to give women workers more opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities, and thus to challenge gender stereotypes. Brands could also contribute to ensuring that all workers earn a living wage, which could help to create room for more 'active agency' (Kabeer 2005) for the workers to decide how they spend their money and time. These are complex solutions that cannot be implemented with quick interventions, and that do not allow a single brand to take credit for the empowerment of the workers in its supply chain. Nonetheless, they could help to engender 'liberating empowerment' (Sardenberg 2008) in the long run.



## References

- Acker, Joan. 1990. "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender & Society* 4 (2): 139-158.
- Acker, Joan. 2006. "Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations." *Gender & Society* 20 (4): 441-464.
- Agnew, Vijay N. 2003. "Gender and Diversity". In *Status of Women Canada*. Paper prepared for the conference on "Intersections of Diversity: Developing New Approaches to Policy and Research".
- Al-Mahmood, Syed Zain. 2013. "Bangladesh pressed on factory safety". *The Guardian*, June 3, 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/jun/06/bangladesh-garment-industry-scrutiny-factory-collapse>
- Arora, Bhanvi. 2017. "Apparel Exporters Say Six Million People May Lose Jobs". *Bloomberg Quint*, November 29, 2017. Available at: <https://www.bloombergquint.com/gst/2017/11/29/apparel-exporters-say-six-million-people-may-lose-jobs>
- Asia Floor Wage. 2017. "What is an Asia Floor Wage?". [Web page]. Available at: <http://asia.floorwage.org/what> (Accessed on February 12, 2017).
- Babbitt, Laura, Drusilla Brown, Negin Toosi, Elyse Voegeli, Dirayati Djaya, Ana Antolin, Alexis Tatore, Ananya Ganesh, and Jade Woo. 2017a. *Women in Factories Foundational Training South Asia Endline Report*. [Slide show]. Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/laborlab/projects/wif/>
- Babbitt, Laura, Drusilla Brown, Negin Toosi, Elyse Voegeli, Dirayati Djaya, Ana Antolin, Alexis Tatore, Ananya Ganesh, and Jade Woo. 2017b. *Women in Factories Advanced Training South Asia Endline Report*. [Slide show]. Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/laborlab/projects/wif/>
- Banerji, Rita. 2016. "A deadly politics of wealth: femicide in India". *Open Democracy*, August 2, 2017. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rita-banerji/deadly-politics-of-wealth-femicide-in-india>
- Beechey, Veronica. 1979. 'On Patriarchy'. *Feminist Review* 3: 66-82.
- Bernard, H. Russell. 2011. *Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. [5th edition]. Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press.
- Blau, Francine D. 1981. "On the Role of Values in Feminist Scholarship". *Signs* 6 (3): 538-540.

BSR. 2017. *Empowering Female Workers in the Apparel Industry: Three Areas for Business Action*. [Report]. Available at:  
[https://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR\\_Empowering\\_Female\\_Workers\\_in\\_the\\_Apparel\\_Industry.pdf](https://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_Empowering_Female_Workers_in_the_Apparel_Industry.pdf)

Butler, Judith. 1988. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40 (4): 519-531.

Butler, Judith. 2000 "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism." In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Debates on the Left*, edited by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, 11–43. London: Verso.

Butler, Judith. 2009. "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics." *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 4 (3): i-xiii.

C&A. 2016. "Inspiring Women: Global engagement campaign supports sustainability". [Web page]. Available at: <http://materialimpacts.c-and-a.com/sustainable-lives/engaging-employees/inspiring-women/> (Accessed on February 13, 2017).

Calvès, Anne Emmanuèle. 2009. « « Empowerment » : généalogie d'un concept clé du discours contemporain sur le développement ». *Revue Tiers Monde* 2009 (4) (No 200): 735-749. DOI 10.3917/rtm.200.0735 [Official English translation].

CARE. 2012a. *Women in Factories Training Program: Foundational Training - Trainer's Guide and Module Learning Plans*. [PDF Guide]. Available from:  
<https://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/womens-economic-empowerment/women-in-factories-curriculum-download>

CARE. 2012b. *Women in Factories Training Program: Advanced Training - Trainer's Guide and Module Learning Plans*. [PDF Guide]. Available from: <https://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/womens-economic-empowerment/women-in-factories-curriculum-download>

Chowdhry, Geeta. 2003. "Engendering development? Women in Development (WID) in international development regimes." In *Feminism/Postmodernism/Development*, edited by Marianne H. Marchand and Jane L. Parpart, 26-41. London and New York: Routledge.

Cividep. 2017. "Towards Decent Work for All." [Web page] Available at:  
<http://www.cividep.org/>

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1), Article 8. Available at:  
<http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>

Connelly, M. Patricia, Tania Murray Li, Martha MacDonald, and Jane L. Parpart. 2000. "Feminism and Development: Theoretical Perspectives". In *Theoretical Perspectives on Gender*

*and Development*, edited by Jane L. Parpart, M. Patricia Connelly, and V. Eudine Barriteau, chap. 3. Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre.

Dasgupta, Rohit K., and K. Moti Gokulsing, eds. 2013. *Masculinity and Its Challenges in India: Essays on Changing Perceptions*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Deka, Meeta. 2013. *Women's Agency and Social Change: Assam and Beyond*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India.

DW News. 2018. "India: 63 million women statistically 'missing,' 21 million unwanted." *DW News*, January 30, 2018. Available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/india-63-million-women-statistically-missing-21-million-unwanted/a-42367722>

Ergun, Ayca and Aykan Erdemir. 2010. "Negotiating Insider and Outsider Identities in the Field: "Insider" in a Foreign Land; "Outsider" in One's Own Land." *Field Methods* 22 (1): 16-38. DOI: 10.1177/1525822X09349919

Fair Wear Foundation. 2017. "About Fair Wear Foundation." [Web page] Available at: <https://www.fairwear.org/about/>

Fashion Revolution. 2017. "Why do we need a Fashion Revolution?" [Web page] Available at: <http://fashionrevolution.org/about/why-do-we-need-a-fashion-revolution/> (Accessed on February 12, 2017).

Felluga, Dino. 2011. "Modules on Marx: On Fetishism". *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. Purdue U. Available at: <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/modules/marxfetishism.html> (Accessed on February 13, 2017).

FIDH. 2014. *Behind the showroom: the hidden reality of India's garment workers*. [Research report]. Available at: [https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/india\\_garment\\_workers\\_report\\_2014.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/india_garment_workers_report_2014.pdf)

Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Peregrine Books.

Gandhi, Triveni. 2017. *Layers of Subordination: Intersectional Approaches to Affirmative Action in Rural India*. [Dissertation]. Abstract available at: <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/47824>

Gap Inc. 2015a. *Our Futures Are Woven Together: Global Sustainability Report 2013-2014*. Available at: <http://www.gapincsustainability.com/sites/default/files/Gap%20Inc.%202013%20-%202014%20Report.pdf>

Gap Inc. 2015b. "Gap Inc. Announces Commitment To Advance The Lives Of One Million Women Through Expansion Of Its Award-Winning, Signature Education Program." [Press

Release] September 28, 2015. Available at:  
[http://www.gapinc.com/content/gapinc/html/media/pressrelease/2015/med\\_pr\\_cgi\\_commitment\\_pace.html](http://www.gapinc.com/content/gapinc/html/media/pressrelease/2015/med_pr_cgi_commitment_pace.html)

Gap Inc. 2017. "Be what's possible: Gap Inc. P.A.C.E. Program - Educating Women." [Web page] Available at: <https://www.bewhatspossible.com/pace>

Gensler, Lauren. 2017. "The World's Largest Retailers 2017: Amazon & Alibaba Are Closing In On Wal-Mart". *Forbes*, May 24, 2017. Available at:  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurengensler/2017/05/24/the-worlds-largest-retailers-2017-walmart-cvs-amazon/#10c8dabf20b5>

GFA and BCG. 2017. *Pulse of the Fashion Industry: Executive Summary*. [Report] Available at:  
[http://globalfashionagenda.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Pulse-of-the-Fashion-Industry\\_Executive-summary.pdf](http://globalfashionagenda.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Pulse-of-the-Fashion-Industry_Executive-summary.pdf)

GLU. 2018. "About." [Web page] Available at: [glu.org.in](http://glu.org.in) (Accessed on January 8, 2018).

H&M. 2016. *Conscious Actions: Sustainability Report 2015*. Available at:  
[http://sustainability.hm.com/content/dam/hm/about/documents/en/CSR/2015%20Sustainability%20report/HM\\_SustainabilityReport\\_2015\\_final\\_FullReport\\_en.pdf](http://sustainability.hm.com/content/dam/hm/about/documents/en/CSR/2015%20Sustainability%20report/HM_SustainabilityReport_2015_final_FullReport_en.pdf)

HERproject. 2017. "HERproject Implementing Partners." [Web page] Available at:  
<https://herproject.org/ngo-partners#india>

Hickel, Jason. 2014. "The 'girl effect': liberalism, empowerment and the contradictions of development." *Third World Quarterly* 35 (8): 1355-1373.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 1986. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33 (6): S14-S32. DOI: 10.2307/800672

Hill Collins, Patricia. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

The Hindu, 2012. "80 p.c. garment workers come to Bangalore for sheer survival." *The Hindu*, September 15, 2012. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/80-pc-garment-workers-come-to-bangalore-for-sheer-survival/article3898214.ece>

Hirschmann, Nancy J. 1998. "Western feminism, eastern veiling, and the question of free agency." *Constellations* 5 (3): 345-368.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell, and Anne Machung. 1990. *The Second Shift*. New York: Avon Books.

hooks, bell. 1990. "Homeplace (a site of resistance)." In *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, 41-49. Boston: South End Press.

hooks, bell. 2000. "Women at work." In *Feminism is for everybody: passionate politics*, 48-54. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

The Huffington Post. 2017. "India Sees Improved Sex Ratio, Decline In Infant Mortality Rate: National Family Health Survey." *The Huffington Post*, January 3, 2017. Available at: <http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/03/01/india-sees-improved-sex-ratio-decline-in-infant-mortality-rate/>

IBEF. 2018. "Textile Industry & Market Growth in India." [Web page]. Available at: <https://www.ibef.org/industry/textiles.aspx>

ILO. 2015. *Insights into working conditions in India's garment industry*. [Report] International Labour Office, Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Geneva: ILO.

Jeyaseelan, Visalakshi, Shuba Kumar, L. Jeyaseelan, Viswanathan Shankar, Bijesh Kumar Yadav, and Shrikant I. Bangdiwala. 2015. "Dowry demand and harassment: prevalence and risk factors in India." *Journal of Biosocial Science* January 2015: 1-19. DOI: 10.1017/S0021932014000571

Jones, Norma and Tonya Perry. 2003. "Women and Social Development: Global Opportunities for Gender-Conscious Transformation in the New Millennium." *Social Work* 39 (2): 95-107.

Kabeer, Naila. 2005. "Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal." *Gender & Development* 13 (1): 13-24.

Kashyap, Aruna. 2017. "Tackling Sexual Harassment in the Garment Industry". *Human Rights Watch*, December 11, 2017. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/11/tackling-sexual-harassment-garment-industry>

Knitting Industry. 2017. "Substantial growth forecast for India's textile and clothing industry." *Knitting Industry*, March 3, 2017. Available at: <http://www.knittingindustry.com/substantial-growth-forecast-for-indias-textile-and-clothing-industry/>

Liddy, Susan. 1995. "Feature Writing in Women's Magazines: a Limited Ideological Challenge." *Irish Communication Review* 5 (1): Article 3. Available at: <http://arrow.dit.ie/icr/vol5/iss1/3>

Liisanantti, Anu, and Karin Beese. 2012. *Gendercide: the missing women?* Study for the European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies. Available at: [http://ecologic.eu/sites/files/project/2013/the\\_missing\\_women.pdf](http://ecologic.eu/sites/files/project/2013/the_missing_women.pdf)

Lockwood, Penelope. 2006. "'Someone like Me can be Successful.' Do College Students need Same Gender Role Models?" *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 30 (1): 36-46.

- Luttrell, Cecilia, Sitna Quiroz, Claire Scrutton, and Kate Bird. 2009. *Understanding and operationalising empowerment*. Working Paper 308 for the Overseas Development Institute.
- Madden, Raymond. 2010. *Being Ethnographic. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2006. "Feminist Theory, Agency, and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt." *Temenos* 42 (1): 31-71.
- Mahutga, Matthew C., and Judith Stepan-Norris. 2015. "Ideological Hegemony." *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*.
- Make In India. n.d. "Textiles and Garments – Statistics." [Web page]. Available at: <http://www.makeinindia.com/sector/textiles-and-garments> (Accessed on March 12, 2017).
- Marks & Spencer. 2016. *Plan A Report 2016*. Available at: [http://annualreport.marksandspencer.com/M&S\\_PlanA\\_Report\\_2016.pdf](http://annualreport.marksandspencer.com/M&S_PlanA_Report_2016.pdf)
- Menon, Nivedita. 2009. "sexuality, caste, governmentality: contests over 'gender' in India." *Feminist review* 91: 94-112.
- Menon, Nivedita. 2015. "Fighting patriarchy and capitalism." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 33 (1): 3-11.
- Millennium Project. 2006. "About the MDGs: What they are." [Web page] Available at: <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/>
- Millett, Kate. 1969. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday.
- Mirdha, Refayet Ullah. 2016. "Bangladesh remains second largest garments exporter, against all odds." *The Daily Star*, July 17, 2016. Available at: <http://www.thedailystar.net/country/bangladesh-remains-second-largest-garments-exporter-against-all-odds-1255084>
- Nazneen, Sohela, Akosua Darkwah, and Maheen Sultan. 2014. "Researching women's empowerment: Reflections on methodology by southern feminists." *Women's Studies International Forum* 45: 55-62.
- OECD. 2017. "India (IND) Exports, Imports and Trade Partners." [Web page]. Available at: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/ind/#Exports> (Accessed February 12, 2017).
- Pandy, Fatima, Laurie Watson, and Vainola Makan. 1997. "Letter." *Agenda* 33: p. 4-8.
- Pittman, Alexandra. 2014. *Fast-Forwarding Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment? Reflections on Measuring Change for UNDP's Thematic Evaluation on Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Equality 2008-2013*. Occasional Paper for the United Nations Development Programme's Independent Evaluation Office. Available at:

[http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/articles-papers/occasional\\_papers/Occasional%20Paper\\_Gender\\_Pittman%20.pdf](http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/articles-papers/occasional_papers/Occasional%20Paper_Gender_Pittman%20.pdf)

Plewes, Betty, and Rieky Stuart. 1991. "Women and development revisited: The case for a gender and development approach." In *Conflicts of interest: Canada and the Third World*, edited by Jamie Swift and Brian Tomlinson, 107-132. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Priya, Nanda, Gautam Abhishek, Verma Ravi, Khanna Aarushi, Khan Nizamuddin, Brahme Dhanashri, Boyle Shobhana, and Kumar Sanjay. 2014. *Study on Masculinity, Intimate Partner Violence and Son Preference in India*. New Delhi: International Center for Research on Women.

Prügl, Elisabeth, and Jacqui True. 2014. 'Equality means business? Governing gender through transnational public-private partnerships. *Review of International Political Economy* 21 (6): 1137-1169. DOI: 10.1080/09692290.2013.849277

Purkayastha, Bandana, Mangala Subramaniam, Manisha Desai, and Sunita Bose. 2003. "The Study of Gender in India: A Partial Review." *Gender & Society* 17(4): 503-524.

Rathgeber, Eva M. 1989. *WID, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice*. [Paper] International Development Research Centre Ottawa. Available at: <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/5225/34345.pdf?sequence=1>

Razavi, Shahra, and Carol Miller. 1995. "From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse." Occasional paper 1 for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

Rowlands, Jo. 1995. "Empowerment examined." *Development in Practice* 5(2): 101-107.

Ruwanpura, Kanchana N., and Alex Hughes. 2016. "Empowered spaces? Management articulations of gendered spaces in apparel factories in Karachi, Pakistan." *Gender, Place & Culture* 23 (9): 1270-1285.

Sandole-Staroste, Ingrid. 2013. "Through gender lenses: Human Needs theory in conflict resolution." In *Conflict Resolution and Human Need*, edited by Kevin Avruch and Christopher Mitchell, 59-76. London and New York: Routledge.

Sanghera, Gurchathen S., and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert. 2008. "Methodological dilemmas: gatekeepers and positionality in Bradford." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (3): 543-562.

Sardenberg, Cecília M.B. 2008. "Liberal vs. Liberating Empowerment: A Latin American Feminist Perspective on Conceptualising Women's Empowerment." *IDS Bulletin* 39: 18-27.

Scott, Joan Wallach. 1986. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review* 91 (5): 1053-1075.

Sharp, Joanne, John Briggs, Hoda Yacoub, and Nabila Hamed. 2003. "Doing gender and development: understanding empowerment and local gender relations." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23 (8): 281-295.

Siddiqi, Dina M. 2009. "do Bangladeshi factory workers need saving? Sisterhood in the post-sweatshop era." *Feminist Review* 91 (1): 154-174.

Sisters for Change. 2016. *Eliminating violence against women at work: Making sexual harassment laws real for Karnataka's women garment workers*. Report in partnership with Munnade. Available at: [http://wo-men.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-06-SFC\\_WomenatWork\\_FullReport\\_June2016.pdf](http://wo-men.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-06-SFC_WomenatWork_FullReport_June2016.pdf)

Sutherland, Jean-Anne. 2010. "Mothering, Guilt and Shame." *Sociology Compass* 4 (5): 310-321.

Swasti. 2014. *Good Business, Doing Good: Stories of change from the Women in Factories program, India*. [Collection of case stories]. Available at: <http://www.swasti.org/images/projects/casestudies/Good%20Business%20Doing%20Good.pdf>

Swasti. 2017a. "Women in Factories Summit 2017." [Video file]. Recorded on January 29, 2017.

Swasti. 2017b. "Who we are." [Web page] Available at: <http://www.swasti.org/about-us/whoweare>

Swasti. n.d. *Women in Factories: My Learnings*. [Workbook]. A 28-page booklet that was distributed to participants of the foundational part of the Women in Factories training.

Tinker, Irene. 1990. "The making of a field: advocates, practitioners and scholars". In *Persistent Inequalities*, 27-53. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

UN Women. n.d. "The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women". [Web page]. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm#statement> (Accessed on February 17, 2017).

UNDP. 2015a. "Table 5: Gender Inequality Index." Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>

UNDP. 2015b. *Human Development Report 2015. Work for Human Development*. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf)

Walby, Sylvia. 1990. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Walby, Sylvia. 2000. "Gender, nations and states in a global era." *Nations and Nationalism* 6 (4): 523-40.



Walmart. 2013. *Global Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative Fact Sheet*. [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from the Walmart website:  
<http://cdn.corporate.walmart.com/ea/cc/20f1ac8c4bb88f9640f58cdc45dc/global-womens-economic-empowerment-initiative-fact-sheet-2013.pdf>

Walmart. 2015. *Walmart's Women's Economic Empowerment: Women In Factories Training Program*. [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from the Walmart website:  
<https://cdn.corporate.walmart.com/1e/77/5c21cd694299b3235703c5ac8102/women-in-factories-fact-sheet-overview.pdf>

Walmart Foundation. 2018. "Our Focus." [Web page]. Available at:  
<http://giving.walmart.com/our-focus>

Yadav, Anumeha. 2016. "Bengaluru protests represent a new wave of militant worker expression, say union leaders." *Scroll.in*, April 22, 2016. Available at:  
<https://scroll.in/article/806968/bengaluru-protests-represent-a-new-wave-of-militant-worker-expression-say-union-leaders>

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2006. "Intersectionality and feminist politics." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13 (3): 193–209.

## Appendix A: Topic lists for interviews

*Note that some of the topics below were included to answer Swasti's question on the long-time durability of the participants' learnings, while they fall outside the scope of this study.*

### **1. Topic list for the initial interviews with the women respondents, to be conducted at their workplaces**

- **Introduction**

- About me, about the interview
- Prior informed consent → recording?

- **Grand tour**

- My day & your day

- **Working life**

- How long have you been working here?
- How did you get this job?
- Can you tell me more about your work?
- Do you & your coworkers get along? Do you support each other? → In what way?
- Dream job childhood
- Do you expect you will still work here in 5 years?

*Other key themes: communication with management, functional literacy (filling out forms, calculating wages & overtime), equal treatment female & male employees, (coping with) stress, facilities at workplace, safety at work, leadership, trade union*

- **Home life**

- About your family: who is living with you?
  - Who is working/going to school/staying at home?
- Do you feel healthy? Would you say that your family members are healthy? Can you tell me what you're doing to stay healthy?
- Who is involved in making decisions about how money is spent, how you divide tasks, how you raise children?
- (If she has kids:) How do you imagine your kids' future? What are you hoping for?

*Other key themes: time management, personal health, family planning, budgeting, communication at home, (coping with) stress, leadership in community*

- **Looking back at WiF**

- Do you remember when you first heard about the program? → Expectations
- Memories from foundational training?
- Do you remember how you felt when you heard you had been selected for the advanced training? → Expectations
- Most important outcome for you?
- Do you remember setting goals during/after the training? → Achieved?
- Have you shared the things you've learned with other women? How?

- The program included different topics: health & nutrition, literacy & personal finance, communication, gender, social status & relationships, leadership.
  - What has been most useful?
  - Any topic which is more challenging to put into practice?
- **Wrapping up**
  - Thanks! Is there anything you'd like to add?
  - Possibility to schedule a home visit?
  - Contact

## **2. Topic list HR managers**

- How did factory become involved in WiF?
- Value of participating in programs like WiF for the company (motivation)
- Selection of participants for advanced program
  - How did that happen, or: how do you think that should happen → priorities
- Vision for the future of the factory & its workers
  - (& future of WiF)
- Vision on gendered task divisions (→ based on observations)
- Opportunities for workers to advance to better positions (with more responsibilities), hiring practices
- Perceptions of other companies (peers)
- 'Empowerment' (definition?) & your contribution

## **3. Topic list family member(s)**

- What do you admire about [participant]?
- Who has the final say about: expenses/budget, task division, parenting?
- Do you feel that [participant] supports you?
  - Do you support her? How?
- What are your dreams for the future of your family?
- Is there anything in particular that you are currently saving money for?

## **4. Topic list gender (for discussions during home visits)**

- Childhood (e.g. brothers-sisters)
- Parents
- Comparing to other households (e.g. neighbors, family members, friends)
- Typical men's tasks/women's tasks
- Functions/festivals: who does what?
- Role models (community, family)
- Power/privilege
- Expectations of son/daughter

## 5. Topic list 1 for interviews with Swasti team members

- Selection of factories
  - How were factories selected/approached?
  - Was Swasti already in contact with these factories prior to WiF?
    - Role of Walmart?
- Structure of program
  - How was time divided among different topics (modules) in foundational & advanced stage?
  - How many meetings were there, in what order were topics discussed?
    - Why?
- Selection of participants
  - Were there any entry requirements to join the foundational program?
  - Did everyone take part?
  - Can you tell me about the involvement of supervisors & male workers?
  - Can you tell me how women were selected for the advanced training?
- Goals
  - What did you find most important for the participants to learn in the two programs?
    - "I hope that participants of the WiF program... (foundational & advanced)"
  - What does empowerment mean to you?
- Methods (is there a 'training manual'?)
  - What kinds of methods & activities did you use in the workshops? Can you give me examples? Can you show me pictures/materials that you used?
    - Room for interactions & participation?
    - Memories that stand out? (e.g. responses)
  - How has the program changed over time?
  - Have there been changes to the methods you've used? Why?
- If you think of the participants now (5 years later), what are you hoping they have achieved? What do you expect to be difficult?
- Imagine the garment industry in South India 10 years from now. What do you think it should look like then? Can you describe the ideal situation? → How could this be achieved?
- Global strategy
  - The program is conducted in different countries - are these programs different as well? To what extent are Swasti & other NGOs exchanging ideas and making decisions together? How is Walmart involved in all this?
  - Finance: Was the program paid for entirely by Walmart?

## 6. Additional input for interviews with Swasti team members

- **Training contents**

- Officially foundational training did not include modules about finance and nutrition. Were these topics included for [Factory 1], [Factory 2] and [Factory 3]?
- What was taught about savings? Was taking part in self help groups/chitty encouraged or discouraged, compared to bank deposits?
- How much room did the program allow for the trainers' creativity? Do you feel like your approach to training was different from that of colleagues? (& effect of personal characteristics like gender)
- Were all advanced trainings done by Swasti trainers, or were there also peer trainers?
- Did some of the participants of the advanced training drop out, and why?

- **History**

- How did Swasti get involved in WiF → who initiated this collaboration?
- How does the program fit in with a larger goal or future vision for Swasti?
- How has it informed Swasti's approach to other similar programs, or vice versa?

## **7. Topic list conversation at Cividep**

- Women's Supervisory Training Programme
- Sensitisation of factory managers, supervisors & workers on harassment issues
- Collaboration with FWF
- (Empowerment → Gap, Walmart, Puma, Benetton, M&S..)

## **8. Topic list conversation at Fair Wear Foundation**

- **Women's Supervisory Training Programme**
- **Reducing Economic Discrimination against women at work (EU) → supervisory skills**
  - Scale?
  - Results? (conversion to supervisory job)
  - Selection of factories
  - Selection of participants
  - Empowerment?
  - Context
  - Training of male supervisors
  - Trade unions
  - Future vision