

The Socio-Spatial Dynamics of Identity Construction in a Gender and Development Communication Initiative

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Concurrent historical shifts in feminist and development theory reflect calls to include men more fully in gender and development work. In this article, we explore the participation of men and women in Taru, a multilayered and participatory entertainment–education based gender and development (GAD) communication initiative in the Indian state of Bihar. The Taru project, co-designed and implemented by one of the present authors with on-the-ground partners, embodied the specific intent of including both females and males in an initiative that would promote better reproductive health, foster more gender equality and spur literacy. By analyzing ethnographic data collected through participatory photography, in-depth and focus interviews and participatory theatre, we work to understand how gendered identities of men and women shift in tandem amidst particular socio-historical, economic and material contexts. As we listened to participants, the politics of space emerged as central to understanding how participants both reproduce and resist hegemonic gendered identities. Adopting a postcolonial feminist stance, we work to understand the gendered politics of space, including tensions between freedom and restriction in movement, and fluid and fixed boundaries.

keywords:

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INTRODUCTION

Development initiatives that focus on gender inequities and do not include men as active participants in the empowerment process are increasingly met with resistance from male community members (Cornwall 1997; Davenport-Sypher et al. 2002). Not surprisingly, concurrent historical shifts in feminist and development theory reflect calls to include men more fully in gender and development work (Chant 2000; McIlwaine and Datta 2003). In this article, we explore the participation of men and women in *Taru*, a multilayered entertainment–education based gender and development (GAD) initiative in the Indian state of Bihar. While India has achieved significant gains in its agricultural, industrial and service sectors since independence from Great Britain in 1947, poverty and gender inequality have declined more slowly than anticipated, in spite of various government and non-government initiatives (Kumar 2002). Although great disparities in levels of social development exist across the various Indian states, the state of Bihar is the most rural, poor and underperforming in health and social indicators (Population Foundation of India 2002). The *Taru* project, co-designed and implemented by one of the authors with on-the-ground partners, sought to include both females and males in a participatory initiative that would promote better reproductive health, reduce gender inequities and spur literacy. The discourses of *Taru* provide fertile ground for making visible the tensions and contradictions that emerge as multiple and shifting gendered identities intersect.

We work to understand how gendered identities of men and women shift in tandem amidst particular socio-historical, economic and material contexts (see also, Ashcraft and Mumby 2004). ‘We stress that the analysis of masculine and feminine identities requires a focus on the dialectics of gender relations and the co-construction of masculinities and femininities,’ argued Ashcraft and Mumby, ‘a task that has yet to be taken on in a significant way in critical organizational studies’ (2004: 181). Ashcraft and Mumby urged scholars to explore how discourses of masculinity and femininity remain interrelated and situated within material conditions beyond embodied subjectivities. In similar fashion, Cheney (2000) argued that interpretive communication scholars, too, often have suffered from a case of ‘symbol worship’, and suggested, ‘interpretive scholarship needs to *come to terms with the material world*’ (Cheney 2000: 44, emphasis in original). Political and even economic power is symbolically produced and disrupted; yet, material practices and environmental conditions intermingle with and shape symbolic interactions. To this end, we position gendered selves as part of larger, historically contingent and shifting discursive and material fields.

As we listened to participants, the *politics of space* emerged as central to understanding how participants both reproduce and resist hegemonic gendered identities. Adopting a post-colonial feminist stance, we work to understand the gendered politics of space, including

tensions between freedom and restriction in movement, and fluid and fixed boundaries. Our own journey as researchers and practitioners demanded entry points for understanding the material and social nature of gendered identity construction. We render visible these entry points by outlining how the evolution of GAD theory–praxis is interwoven with the evolution of feminist movements, articulating our postcolonial feminist stance and describing both the *Taru* initiative and our research practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL STANDPOINT

Historical shifts in feminist theory and practice have influenced development theory, policy and praxis (Connelly 2000; Kabeer 1994; Parpart and Marchand 1995; Mcllwaine and Datta 2003). In this section, we chart these shifts and articulate our postcolonial feminist standpoint.

Shifts in Development Theory and Practice

The United Nations Decade for Women (1975–85) highlighted concerns about the ‘invisibility’ and increased marginality of women in the course of development (Chant and Guttmann 2000). Planners and agencies, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), subsequently incorporated women in development initiatives during the 1970s and initiated the Women in Development (WID) approach (Parpart and Marchand 1995). Unfortunately, the WID approach too often positioned women as an ‘addendum’ to pre-existing development programmes, promoting equal opportunity for women to ‘play the game’ without rearticulating the rules by which the game was played (Mcllwaine and Datta 2003). Further, much like second wave Western feminist scholarship, WID projects glossed over differences among women and intersections between gendered, raced and classist discourses. At the same time, WID focused on women’s issues often in isolation from men and to the exclusion of gendered social relations as enacted and negotiated in social practices (Kabeer 1994).

Paralleling a move towards postcolonial feminisms, development policy shifted, at least in rhetoric, to a ‘gender and development’ (GAD) framework during the 1980s. This shift differentiated between biological sex and socially constructed gender, emphasizing the absence of universal gender roles across diverse global settings (Kabeer 1994; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Rathgeber 1995). The GAD framework focused attention on the socio-historical gendered relations between men and women and called for a ‘fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions, [and] a rethinking of hierarchical gender relations’ (Rathgeber 1995: 206). Likewise, postcolonial feminist standpoints also emphasize historical specificity

(Harding 1998; Hegde and Shome 2002; Shome and Hegde 2002). A postcolonial feminist standpoint necessarily examines the historical and contextual connections between control over discourse and assertions of power. From the time that formal European colonial rule began to end in the 1950s and the 1960s, the restoring of global history has emerged with narratives of cultural imperialism. A deconstruction of development rhetoric reveals how the interactions of modern Western cultures with those in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America have historically been presented as mainly diffusing Western accomplishments to ‘backward’ peoples (Barker 2000; Harding 1998). Postcolonial feminist accounts make visible the continual interactions between transnational cultures, and the effects of such interactions on how cultures emerge, are transformed and decline.

Integrative thinking, too, problematizes monolithic representations through recognition of the multiple identities/subjectivities (for example, class, race, generational and culture) that shape lived experiences of women and men (Ashcraft and Mumby 2004; Buzzanell 1994). Postcolonial feminist discourses evolved at a time when scholars–activists found the project of naming shared themes in our personal stories increasingly complex (for example, Hooks 1984). Feminists are faced with the challenge of recognizing differences existing between us in order to avoid the creation of a ‘monolithic’ feminism that supposedly represents all women and men. A defining characteristic of postcolonial discourse is its inclination to ask: which personal and whose politics? ‘We must recognize that there can be no single representative subject of feminism,’ argues Siegel (1997: 61–62), ‘while at the same time, we must continue to speak in a collective voice that articulates political demand on behalf of a group called “women”’.

Postcolonial feminisms have influenced (and have been influenced by) development theory–praxis and can further enrich development discourses. The GAD approach views women’s situations as a ‘function of multiple power relationships’ (Rathgeber 1995: 207). The GAD perspective and postcolonial feminisms are guided by several overlapping concerns, such as accounting for differences and avoiding cultural effacement that obscures women with different identities (Heywood and Drake 1997; McIlwaine and Datta 2003; Mohanty 2003; Narayan 1997; Rathgeber 1995). A noticeable shift, thus, is evident in both feminist and development thinking, whereby space emerged for multiple voices and recognition of shift-ing forms of oppression. In spite of these conceptual shifts in feminist thinking and in the ‘rhetoric’ of development theory–praxis, Moser (1989) argued that development planning for women remains firmly entrenched in the WID worldview. Rathgeber suggested that resistance towards a GAD standpoint in development agencies remains strong, in part, because of the transformative nature of GAD ideologies—values that are ‘likely to be politically sensitive and personally threatening to members of privileged elite groups’ (Rathgeber 1995: 219). It is within this rhetorical space of inclusion and difference that we situate our arguments to:

(a) include men in development initiatives; and (b) position the discourses of development as sites of competing forms of masculinity and femininity.

The Role of Men in Development Initiatives

Postcolonial feminist theorizing increasingly recognizes differences that exist among women, discouraging the tendency to universalize or essentialize women (Mohanty 2003; Narayan 1997). Yet, too often, feminists study the diverse social constructions of femininity in relation to a monolithic notion of masculinity (see critiques by Ashcraft and Mumby 2004; Harter 2004; Mumby 1998; Spitzack 1998a, 1998b). Mumby cautioned us that masculinity is not a stable, homogeneous structure, and encouraged scholars to explore the ‘ways in which different (and in some ways opposing) conceptions of masculinity are socially constructed’ (Mumby 1998: 171). Both masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and affected by other discourses of difference, including race and class. Neither masculinity nor femininity exists in monolithic form, nor are they perfectly embodied by individuals as they craft and perform identity in the differentiated contexts of their lives. Indeed, Connell (1995: 3) argued that ‘gender’ is ‘historically shifting and politically fraught [with tension]’. Gendered identities remain open to redefinition as they are constructed during social interactions and in particular socio-historical and material contexts.

We problematize ‘masculinity’ alongside ‘femininity’ and agree with Cox et al. (1997: 198) that ‘there must be a place for men and positive, non-oppressive “masculinities” in a feminist politics for the 1990s’. Programmes that promote reproductive health and anti-violence, in particular, have benefited from the inclusion of men (Chant and Gutmann 2000). If GAD worldview is to be embodied in action, men and women alike must be included in programme design and implementation. Cornwall aptly argued:

By disregarding the complexities of male experience, by characterizing men as ‘the problem,’ and by continuing to focus on women-in-general as the ‘oppressed,’ development initiatives that aim to be ‘gender-aware’ can fail to address...the issues of equity and empowerment that are crucial in bringing about positive change. (Cornwall 1997: 8)

Using postcolonial feminist theorizing as a backdrop, we present a case study of *Taru*, a GAD initiative that involved men as partners with women and children. *Space* emerged in data collection and analysis as central to understanding the production, organization and distribution of cultural power and shifting gendered identities. *Space* constitutes a site and medium for the enactment of cultural power (Shome 2003) and as such, has important implications for thinking about social relations, identity construction and agency. Like other

scholars (for example, Massey 1994; McKerrow 1999), we view space as both material and symbolic, and work to reveal how participants wrestle with issues of space in light of shifting cultural scenes and societal scripts.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As researchers, we privilege socially constructed realities, local specificities and emergent meanings. Our fieldwork and analysis were guided by reflexivity and a collaborative spirit (see also, Mishler 1986; Olesen 2000).

Context

Taru, a 52 episode entertainment–education radio soap opera, named after its key female protagonist, was aired in the Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh from February 2002 to February 2003. The multilayered GAD communication initiative included the weekly broadcast of the radio serial; on-the-ground reproductive health service delivery in 25,000 villages through a partnership with Janani, a network of rural health providers; village-based folk performances in certain areas to prime audience members to listen to the radio programme; establishment of formal and informal *Taru* listening groups in several villages; participatory theatre workshops and performances by avid listeners of the programme; and several other allied activities. One of the authors played a key role in the concept development, design and implementation of *Taru*. He oversaw the theoretically driven design of the programme and the integration of the on-air broadcast and on-the-ground group listening components, and also led the formative and summative evaluation.

The concept and design of *Taru* was driven by local needs, and involved community inputs at every stage. The four Indian states where *Taru* was broadcast represent a combined population of 200 million people, the lowest per capita income, literacy and contraceptive prevalence rates, coupled with the highest fertility and infant and maternal mortality rates in India (Singhal et al.2004). Extensive reviews of literature on gender inequality and reproductive health practices in these four states, including cultural taboos and traditions that undergirded such practices, informed the scriptwriters' message briefs. Members of the *Taru* scriptwriting team, comprising both men and women, were chosen carefully to ensure that at least half of the scriptwriters (of a team of eight) either hailed from these four states or had extensive experience living in them. This was important to ensure that local idioms, metaphors and vernacular were understood and respected in the development of plots and dialogues. Further,

the scriptwriting team of both men and women spent one full week visiting several dozen villages in the broadcast area to gain additional familiarity with local conditions. Based on these inputs, once the pilot episodes of *Taru* were ready, they were taken back to the field for extensive pre-testing, leading to refinement as per local sensibilities.

The storylines of *Taru* included several male characters that were supportive of women's empowerment. For instance, Shashikant, the male protagonist, is portrayed as committed to the realization of women's rights. Another character, Kaplishwar, is married to a friend of *Taru* and, as the serial progresses, supports his wife's desire to open a school for low-caste children. Aloni Baba, a local spiritual teacher, addresses structural social ills like dowry, discrimination against girls in education, large family size and early marriage. These male characters resist a hegemonic masculinity (that is, a patriarchal subjectivity), instead embodying an alternative notion of self and other characterized by interdependence and equality.

The *Taru* project encouraged extensive community participation involving both men and women in several ways. First, the ground-based service delivery of reproductive health counselling and supplies in rural Bihar was provided by a couple (usually a husband and wife) comprising a male rural health practitioner (RHP) and a women health practitioner (WHP). Women in the community would not be comfortable discussing reproductive health issues with men, so this allowed women to seek advice from women and men from men. Second, several dozen listeners groups were created for young girls, young men, women and families, in several villages of Bihar. Within these informal groups, men, women and children reflected on the storylines of *Taru* and envisioned (and sometimes enacted) social change. Third, both male and female listeners were involved in participatory theatre performances that occurred after the *Taru* serial had ended. Over a period of a week during the Summer of 2004, some 50 members of *Taru* listeners' groups had the opportunity to develop skills in scriptwriting, character development, costume and set design, voice projection and body control, and acting and singing. Participants then had the opportunity to share stories of their lives. Although the girls were more shy than the boys and, in some cases, participants had difficulty understanding what counted as a 'story', a rich collage of narratives quickly emerged within each group. Group members identified common themes among their stories, created a 'meta-story' and then, developed a script. The groups created and performed three different plays in four rural communities to over 1,500 local villagers. For most participants, including two dozen young women participants, it was the first time that they performed in a public space.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a period of 16 months in Abirpur, Madhopur, Chandrahatti and Kamtual villages, located in Vaishali and Muzzaffarpur districts of Bihar. The research site

was limited to the rural areas (that is, villages) and did not include urban or peri-urban areas. These villages were selected for fieldwork based on the high level of *Taru*-related field-based orchestrations that were conducted in these four villages. This research draws upon data collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant photography. We also drew on scripts that were created by participants during the participatory theatre. All data were collected in Hindi, the language commonly spoken in north India, by a group of 10 field researchers, including two of the authors. Having native fluency in Hindi, these authors were able to conduct field discussions and were able to check the transcripts for accuracy. The fieldwork consisted of approximately 40 person days during the spring and summer of 2003, and 28 person days during the summer of 2004. Keeping in mind the cultural practices, males interviewed male participants and females interviewed female participants. The research team followed approved institutional review board (IRB) protocols throughout data collection, including having all participants sign informed consents. In the case of minors, parents or legal guardians also signed informed consents.

In-depth Interviews

We conducted in-depth interviews with individual respondents to gain a holistic understanding of their perceptions of gendered identities. Open-ended, semi-structured interviewing enabled spontaneous interactions between the researchers and respondents while providing detailed accounts (see also, Fontana and Frey 1998). We used a collaborative model of interviewing. Also known as the friendship model, this model conceives of friendship as being developed through research, and encourages the researcher to be responsive to the respondents. Our discussions encouraged a dialogue between the researchers and the participants. Questions were posed by both researchers and respondents (see also, Mishler 1986; Oakley 1981). Several participants were interviewed on repeated visits on different aspects of the *Taru* initiative. A total of 43 male and 73 female participants, most of them avid listeners of *Taru*, were interviewed between March 2003 and July 2004.

Focus Group Discussions

We used focus groups as a supplementary data source. The focus groups allowed us to increase the number of participants in a shorter period of time and to see patterns emerge through participants' dialogue (see also, Morgan 1997). In addition, we believe the focus group discussions were in keeping with feminist sensibilities. First, the group discussions privileged the social context by focusing on group interaction. Second, the researcher as moderator was

able to shift the power and flow of the discussion to the respondents' themselves. Third, the group dialogue served as an empowering and consciousness raising tool for the participants as they were able to articulate their individual standpoints and voice their beliefs and practices through collective talk (see also, Wilkinson 2004). Nine focus groups were held in the spring of 2003 and four in the summer of 2004. A total of 27 males and 32 females participated in focus group discussions.

Participatory Photography

Participatory photography involved handing over disposable cameras—the means of knowledge production—to the community members. We handed out disposable cameras in 2003 to 11 listeners (seven women and four men) of *Taru*, and again, in 2004, to 18 participants (11 women and seven men). After being briefed on how to use the cameras, community members were asked, among other things, to take pictures that reflected the gender norms and realities they experienced and their perceptions of masculinity and femininity. A total of 461 photographs were taken. Once the photographs were developed, participants were asked to share their photo-stories with the researchers. Participatory photography, thus, served as an opportunity for community members to communicate their experiences—the visual and verbal stories worked interdependently to privilege perspectives that may have been previously muted or ignored (see also, Singhal and Rattine-Flaherty 2006).

Data Analysis

We engaged in a constant comparative analysis of the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967), coding and categorizing the interview transcripts, group discussions and photo narratives. The entire data set was read multiple times by the authors. A constant comparative method allowed themes representing recurring patterns of behaviour and meaning to emerge from the participants' own words, as understood by us, based on our theoretical sensibilities. The process began by manually coding the data on the actual transcripts. By engaging in a constant comparative analysis of data, we continually compared specific incidents in the data, refined concepts and identified their properties. After going over the transcripts several times to make sense of the emergent stories, the authors met and discussed the recurrent thematic codes. In addition, the researchers' field notes were referred to during the analysis. Throughout data analysis and interpretation, we sought to treat responses as discourse occurring within contexts and connected to larger narrative accounts shared by participants (see also, Mishler 1986).

Through the use of ‘clustering’ and ‘metaphor making’, which involved conceptual and figurative grouping, an overarching theme along with two sub-themes were delineated (see also Huberman and Miles 1998). Space emerged as central to understanding participants’ sense of belonging, community, individual and group identities. We now present a co-constructed account, weaving between the voices of participants as shared in photos, narratives elicited through interviews, participatory theatre performances and our own voices as scholars with postcolonial feminist sensibilities.

RESULTS

A group of young boys who are avid listeners of ‘Taru’, were concerned that Farah, a young girl in their village had stopped attending school. Farah’s parents were hesitant to let her travel alone to the neighbouring town where the school was located. These boys discussed this problem and decided to take turns escorting Farah to school. (Focus Group Fieldnotes)

In Abirpur village, male and female members of *Taru* listening groups collectively started a school for underprivileged children, inspired by a similar act modelled by Neha, a character in the *Taru* serial. Such mixed-sex and mixed-caste collaboration was highly uncommon in Bihar’s villages. The youth faced strong resistance from some community members. However, these groups’ collective zeal, coupled with strong support from the highly respected local RHP made the establishment of the school possible. Between 2002 and 2003, approximately 50 children attended this school, which operated for 2 hours each afternoon, six days a week. In this case, the space of the school was not a mere setting across which cultural activities and emergent performances unfolded. The traditional spatial context of learning, a space of exclusion for females and those of lower castes, was (re)envisioned as a space of inclusion. In material and symbolic ways, a space for safe learning for young women like Farah emerged as a site and medium for the enactment of cultural power with implications for identity politics. If spaces are the products of relations (see Massey 1994, 1995, 1999), then spaces of any kind, including the creation and maintenance of this school, are actively remade in relations that inform the shifting production of identities. Participants rearticulated the meaning and material enactment of school, and in so doing constructed alternative ways of knowing and being.

Unfortunately, when one of the authors returned to Bihar during the Summer of 2004, the school was no longer in operation. It had closed down after six months, primarily on account of monsoons. However, it never reopened. Practices that work to restructure deeply

entrenched spatial patterns and practices (for example, exclusion of women and girls from public education) are difficult to sustain in light of the sheer ‘rootedness’ of cultural practices in these villages, and without ongoing material and social support.

As we listened to participants, watched their participatory theatre performances and made sense of their photo novellas, *space* emerged as central to understanding shifting (and stable) gendered identities in the midst of *Taru*-related discourses. A case in point: during the participatory theatre workshops and performances, two of the three groups created and performed socially charged plays about the exclusion of females and lower-caste individuals from formal school systems. Consider the following translated excerpt from one script:

Rajeev’s daughter attends school and is harassed by the neighbourhood boys because they believe girls should stay at home. The girl complains to her parents. Rajeev, although supportive of his daughter’s education, is portrayed as a weak man who decides to withdraw her from school as he fears social opposition. But his wife is a strong woman, and with the help of her two sons, she is able to convince her husband to continue their daughter’s education. (Participatory Theatre Script)

The theatre performances, as well as narratives shared during interviews, reveal very ‘situated’ and ‘rooted’ notions of how participants perceive self and other, perceptions that reflect deeply entrenched ideological meaning formations and, in some cases, fossilized institutions (see Burke 1935). Our conversations revealed that for these community members, the geographical locale or space was very much intertwined with a psycho-social sense of place and self. For instance, participants repeatedly referred to themselves as belonging to *dehat*, a Hindi word that connotes both a sense of physical place (that is, remote and underdeveloped) as well as a mindset (that is, traditional and backward). Participants articulated powerful social maps of acceptable and non-acceptable *places* for girls and boys, women and men, those in upper and lower castes, and revealed how they enact gendered identities that shape and are shaped by the politics of space. Moreover, some participants, in their actions and talk, are working to disrupt otherwise ‘fixed’ views of space. Participants in the theatre workshops and performances shared their personal stories, connected their stories to other participants’ narratives and rehearsed alternatives to dominant societal scripts. For many of the young female participants, the very act of performing in a public space disrupted hegemonic gendered identities (see Kumar 1993).

As communication scholars and practitioners, we recognize lived spaces as characterized by political, economic and geographic exigencies, and simultaneously defined by social relations and symbolic activities (see also McKerrow 1999; Shome 2003). As such, spaces are as fluid as their constitutive social and material relations. ‘One way of thinking about space,’ argued

Massey, 'is as particular moments in such intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed, laid down, interlaced with one another, decayed and renewed' (Massey 1994: 120). Following Massey's lead, we draw attention to how participants talk about and engender space, and how their discourses and actions work to both reify and disrupt the dominant time–space paths and identities of community members. While we are aware of the myriad forms of gender-based discrimination that exist in social settings and, also, of the ways other forms of social discrimination (for example, caste) intersect with gender to further gender-based differences, this present study focuses on how 'space' affects and alters the perception of, and performance of, dominant gendered norms. In particular, we work to understand how participants construct self and other based on communal and historical narratives about *locale*. Participants' discourses reveal the gendered politics of space, including: (a) tensions between freedom and restriction in movement; and (b) perceptions about fluid and fixed spatial boundaries.

Movement: Freedom and Restriction

The metaphor of movement appeared in myriad forms in our conversations with both male and female participants in Bihar. For young women, in particular, the notion of restricted movement formed an integral part of how they understood and performed femininity. It was a common refrain among these girls that they could 'not go out' as freely as boys. These girls also astutely recognized that spatial restrictions on their movements prevented their moving ahead socio-economically. Participants suggested that the ability to 'move out' and 'move freely' was a way to 'move ahead'. Ankit, a male participant, shared:

Today there is a lot of change, earlier men would live only in their village as a result of which he remained backward. Earlier they would not let their wives come out from their houses; they could not do any work outside their house. But now that the men are getting more and more educated [and moving away from the villages], even women are getting more aware, and now they encourage their wives to work outside.

Another male participant, Jyotish, aptly revealed how restricted movement itself remains a situated phenomenon. By travelling beyond the geographical boundaries of his home village, he encountered alternative gendered roles and performances.

I have observed it is only in our village that the girls are not permitted to go outside their house; people always worry about what others will say if they see their daughters going out. This is not the case outside in cities. The girls work outside their homes.

For Rakhi, a 14 year old girl, the primary distinction between her and a boy was that since she is a girl, she cannot go out or go to public places where boys are present. ‘Boys can go wherever they feel like, but girls can only go to places where their parents permit them to go,’ said Rakhi. Neelam, a mother of three, recalls her childhood and how she was told that she mustn’t move around too much or go outside the house even as her brother was ‘told to study, to move around’. Sarita photographed a young boy on bicycle who ‘is a senior in secondary school and does outside work (see Image 1). He is coming back from the market, depicting how boys have the freedom to move in the ‘outside world’ as well as pursue higher education.

Image 1
Boy on a Cycle



Source: Authors’ research.

Yet, Rakhi further explained that much had changed with respect to girls' education; some parents now permitted their daughters to attend school in spite of the presence of boys. Similarly, Kumkum felt that restrictions on movement had evolved (and lessened) over generations and even across the life course of a woman:

My grandmother never came out of the house. My mother also did not move out of the house and observed *Purdah* [veiling]. Now neither she nor Aunt (my paternal uncle's wife) observe *Purdah* and seclusion practices because they have adult children...now my aunt goes wherever she wants with her husband.

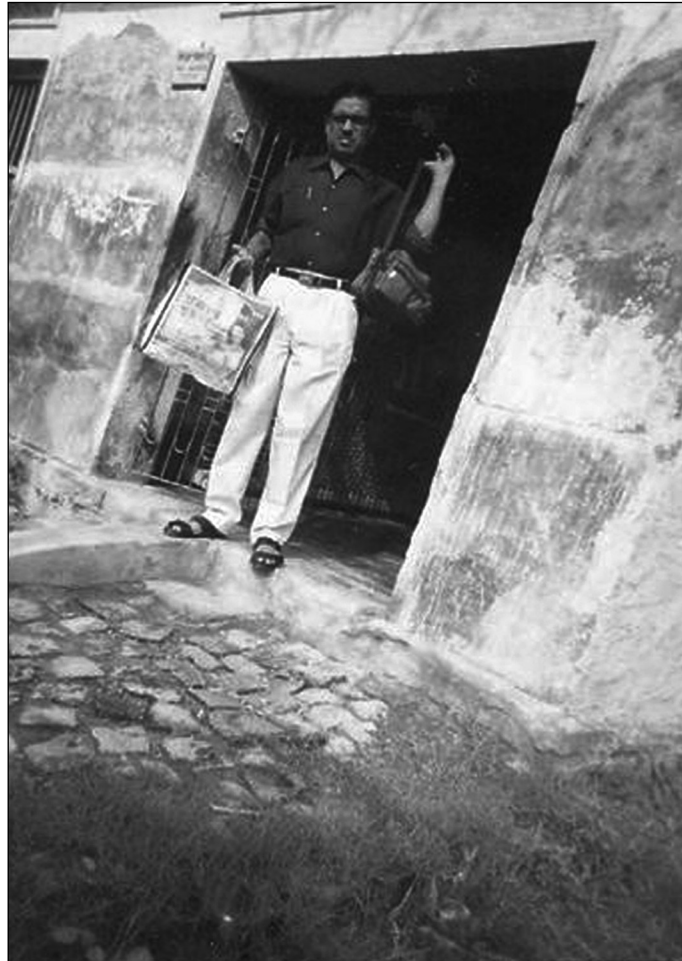
For several women, education was a means of moving out and, consequently, moving ahead. Chanchala, a mother of two daughters and one son, told us that in order to ensure a better future for her children, she will 'educate them and make them move ahead'. However, for younger girls, these dreams were for themselves and not the next generation. For instance, Rakhi told the researchers, 'I wish to study like you. Go for higher studies and move ahead, go out just like the boys. I wish like the boys we too could go out and study as per our desire.' Some participants thanked the creators of *Taru* for providing role models of women whose movements was less restricted and expressed a desire to be like *Taru*. One person noted: 'These girls are trying to learn to ride a bike. After listening to *Taru*, girls are changing. Listening to radio these girls learn new ideas. It doesn't have to be because of *Taru*, but they are influenced by something new.' The discourses surrounding *Taru* seem to have provided fertile ground for dialogue among listeners about alternative spatial relations and social lives. We heard and glimpsed numerous disruptions to the otherwise stable spatial bedrock of these villages.

Contrary to the sense of restricted movement experienced by many female participants, 'masculinity' was characterized by movement, dynamism and being active. In fact, idleness or sitting around at home was considered 'unmanly'. Uday told us that,

Those men who sit idle at home are told to behave like a man. It is not manly to sit at home like a fool. If a man does not have any work to do, he should go out to look for a job, so that he can be a man.

Movement within the public sphere was typical and encouraged among male participants. For instance, Soni showed us a picture of her father standing outside the house, dressed to go to work and told us that she took this picture to reflect how proud she felt that 'my father is going out to make a place for himself in the world' (see Image 2). Her cousin took a very similar picture and explained that 'this is father going to work. My mother is inside. I took this picture to show that work (as in a job) is a man's duty in addition to helping in the house.'

Image 2
Father Going to Work



Source: Authors' research.

The intersections and mutual influences of 'space' and 'gender' remain deep, with each implicated in the profound construction of the other. Participants drew clear connections between restricted movement and women lacking the ability to handle public sphere duties. A young man felt that women couldn't manage public roles because 'in the village context we do not let her [women] step out of her home, we are unable to educate them properly'. These

participants shared lived accounts of space that reinforce the theoretical position advanced by Massey (1994: 177), who argued, ‘Geography in its various guises influences the cultural formation of particular genders and gender relations; gender has been deeply influential in the production of “the geographical.”’

In stark contrast to femininity, the ability to move ahead and mix around with others were qualities women associated with dominant forms of masculinity. Archana Kumari, a 20 year old female, expressed that men ‘must be able to do things for their family because to move ahead they would have to carry the whole family forward.’ When asked what qualities she expected in her future husband she stated, ‘he should be someone who can move around in society...his thoughts should be good, he should be educated, people should trust him and he should be able to take care of his family in all respects.’ Some participants indicated that both the village environment and joint family arrangements often prohibited free movement among women and girls. For instance, Neelam lived in a joint family with her husband’s parents and her brothers-in-law and their families. In several senses, she was restricted being a daughter-in-law and this was intensified in an extended family. Neelam felt, ‘A girl cannot progress in a joint family. If I want my daughter to progress I will have to live separately in a town.’ She suspected that if she continued to live in the family home, her in-laws would likely object to her educating her daughter. If she and her husband ‘moved out’ and lived in a nearby town, she could provide her daughter with opportunities for higher education.

If spatial practices ‘secretly structure’ the determining conditions of social life (de Certeau 1984: 96), what do the everyday practices of lived space among these village-based participants reveal about intersections between the politics of space and the politics of identity? The metaphor of movement became a revealing prism through which to make sense of how participants understand and enact gendered identities. These participants perceive men and boys as generally endowed with a larger repertoire of spaces and related social relations. Males and females alike perceive the movement of women and girls in their villages as much more ‘fixed’ and ‘restricted’. Shome argued:

The production of space is connected to how spatial relations process, distribute, position, and target bodies. Indeed, the corporeality of our bodies, and how they are included and excluded from the public realm, cannot be thought of outside of the spatial relations that constitute bodies. (Shome 2003: 47)

Movement and mobility represent spatial practices through which female bodies are rendered out of place in specific contexts, thereby ‘containing’ women and girls in particular spaces. Ultimately, participants’ narratives are powerful reminders that space represents more

than the stage for life's drama—it represents a profound centre of meaning, a clustering of symbols of experience. Spatial movement, for these participants, implies possibilities and limits, gendered roles and responsibilities.

Spatial Boundaries: Fixed and Fluid

The metaphor of 'boundaries' coalesces with the metaphor of 'movement' in participants' narratives, and reveals how sensory images of space are interwoven in the life experiences and gendered identities of participants. Participants commonly agreed upon and drew clear boundaries between 'women's work' and 'men's work' that paralleled clear boundaries between private and public spheres. Marriage remained a central dimension of the lives of participants, especially women and girls. Both the married and the single women discussed their lives as separated into two clearly demarcated phases—before and after marriage—and demarcated spaces—natal homes and marital homes. Socio-spatial boundaries and dynamics extend beyond any given particular locale and moment as they stretch across time to fix identities. A case in point: mothers and grandmothers often encouraged young girls to learn domestic skills such as cooking, cleaning and sewing as preparation for their married life. In this section, we draw attention to how participants talk about 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in ways that (a) reify the 'fixed' nature of boundaries for some individuals; and (b) foster the experience of 'fluid' boundaries for other individuals.

Community members generally agreed that private sphere responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning the house historically have been relegated to the female members of the family, while the 'outside work' or the public sphere responsibilities traditionally were carried out by the men. Importantly, males and females alike co-constructed their gendered identities based, in large part, on such spatial boundaries. In some cases, these boundaries seemed fixed and non-negotiable; in other cases, the borderlands appeared porous and shifting. Indeed, a few participants expressed that 'limits' were being contested and transgressed, resulting in the blurring or extending of pre-established boundaries. When asked to describe what being a man meant to them, both men and women emphasized that men were expected to carry out certain responsibilities such as caring for their families by earning money, doing work 'outside' the home and generally looking after their family's well-being. Women and girls generally agreed that traditional gender roles were arbitrary and that both sexes could perform similar tasks and they should be given the freedom to do so. Mothers felt that they should teach their sons how to cook because boys were likely to move out of their homes and live alone in the cities where they would need such skills. Although in principle these women believed that boys should learn how to cook, they expressed that they would not be happy if their husbands

were doing the cooking in their presence. If they (the women) were sick, they could make an exception, but otherwise, they were not comfortable watching their spouses cook. Soni Kumari told us, ‘males do the outside work and females do all the household work’. She shared that boys do not generally do the cooking in their community, ‘when he is living away from home, then he has to cook, but this [a boy cooking] does not happen at home here.’ Soni further stated, ‘I would not find it appropriate for me to relax while he cooks the food,’ thus reflecting the sentiments and mindset shared by several women.

Young women often drew clear boundaries between women and men’s roles, and envisioned their husbands as all-powerful caregivers. Archana shared, ‘females should perform their duties toward their husbands. Whatever the husband tells her she must obey, as both of them have to walk together in life.’ Similarly, Puman explained that a husband is like God. Her friend, Soni, viewed a husband as being the ultimate provider and keeper of women, and explained that,

if he takes care of all my needs then there is nothing wrong if he hits me for my mistakes. My parents look after me and all my needs and if I do something wrong they can slap me, there is nothing wrong with that. After I leave my parents house, my husband will be like my parents.

The following group conversation further exemplifies how some young women perceived gender-related boundaries as non-negotiable:

Moderator: What if a husband beats his wife for no reason?

Participant A: That is wrong.

Moderator: What will you do if he hits you?

Participant A: The wife cannot do anything because a girl has no right to hit back.

Moderator: Why do you think this is so?

Participant B: Because that is how it has been from the beginning.

Moderator: So custom or tradition doesn’t let a woman beat her husband or hit him back but tradition allows a husband to beat or hit his wife?

Participant A: Yes they can beat us but the wife cannot beat them...

Participant B: She cannot slap her husband.

Participant C: Because she has to respect her husband.

Participant D: Even if the wife dies because of her husband’s beatings she will go to heaven. Whereas, if the wife slaps her husband she will go to hell. It is a sin to raise your hand on your husband.

Even rewards and punishments for behaviours and role performances reflect spatial dynamics (for example, heaven and hell), and provide maps that influence participants' attitudes and behaviours.

Further, participants from higher castes drew boundaries between their lives and those individuals belonging to the lower castes. They emphasized that lower caste women worked on the fields for daily wages but 'we' or 'our' women did not work on the fields under any circumstances. Several of the photographs portrayed lower caste women in the field or taking vegetables to sell in the market, illustrating how women belonging to lower caste groups actually experienced more mobility and played a more active role in public sphere activities. In similar vein, a middle-aged upper caste Hindu man commented that 'the tailor does not behave properly with his wife. He is a Muslim,' once again distinguishing himself from other religious groups.

The discourses of *Taru*, the participatory theatre scripts and a few of the photo novellas provide glimpses of resistance to the hegemonic gendered identities of participants. For instance, Neha photographed a young man, Mukesh, who was learning how to knit (see Image 3). Mukesh proudly exclaimed, 'So what if I am a boy? It is imperative that I do a girl's work too.'

The script of *Taru* included women characters who work in the public sphere (that is, *Taru* and Neha). Likewise, members of *Taru* listener groups created and performed a participatory theatre script that disrupted dominant spatial boundaries and gendered identities:

Chandni (the protagonist of the play) wants to study, but her father does not allow her to go to school. In his opinion, only sons should get educated. He is confident of his three sons' future success, and provides them with ample educational opportunities. But Chandni's mother supports Chandni's education against her husband's will. One day, Chandni's father has an accident and becomes paralyzed. He looks to his grown sons for support, but they are portrayed as 'good for nothing' and are unable to help. Meanwhile, Chandni has done very well in her studies and has a good job. She supports her family in the aftermath of her father's accident. Chandni's father realizes his mistake and repents. He asks the audience not to repeat his mistake, and to give their daughters equal opportunities to succeed. (Participatory Theatre Script)

Spatial politics as performed by participants reveal social and material dynamics that form encrusted boundaries—boundaries that remain difficult to breakdown. We do not believe that the one week participatory theatre workshops and performances have disrupted the deeply ingrained nature of boundaries between public and private, women's work and men's work,

Image 3
A Young Man Learning to Knit



Source: Authors' research.

masculinity(s) and femininity(s). However, the theatre workshops and performances did provide opportunities for young people to work together and voice their concerns—on stage, with a microphone—in front of their parents, elders and other community members. The performances represent important rehearsals for raising consciousness and fostering change (see Boal 1979). By providing an arena for participants to performatively engage in sense making about their lived experiences, the participatory theatre project exposed important intersections between autobiographical accounts and hegemonic cultural narratives.

During in-depth and focus group interviews, participants also talked about shifting spatial boundaries. 'In earlier times girls did not go far off to study,' Khusboo explained.

Take the case of my own village, here girls never used to go far for studies. Now we go very far. People used to come home to teach girls in olden times. Now we go to far off places to attend tutorials and coaching classes.

As mentioned in the opening section, Kumkum notes that ‘earlier we never got the freedom to go anywhere. We could not go anywhere. You have met my father and know how he is. Now father says “alright go.”’ These comments illustrate the lived tensions and interplay between rigid and negotiable boundaries, with some examples of occasions when boundaries were transgressed and renegotiated. Khusboo spoke of Lalli, a girl from her village who completed her undergraduate studies and ‘went outside and started a beauty salon...in the middle of town where only men have shops.’ This is uncommon given the context—women from this community do not typically leave their homes until they get married and move to their husband’s village. Lalli was single and had chosen a career that could be considered rather revolutionary for people in this village. One woman emphasized that jobs that were previously options only for boys were now opening up for girls, such as enlisting in the armed forces. She told us that her daughter had just enrolled in the Bihar Police Services, and explained that such shifts in traditional gender roles were becoming common: ‘this has become a normal thing, now several girls are joining the forces. Lots have already gone, we are not the first family [to have a daughter enlist]. From this village itself two girls have joined CRP’ (a branch of the armed forces).

Throughout our discussions, though, it became evident that men are better situated to negotiate and stretch spatial boundaries than women. For instance, Kumkum shared, ‘since my birth my father has never shown that I am his daughter. He considers me like a son...my father has taught me everything.’ Kumkum believes that men play an important role in raising children, although in her opinion, only half of the men in her village involve themselves in child rearing activities (that is, a primary activity of the private sphere). She recalled from her early years that her ‘father would bathe all the children in the mornings. Only when everyone had bathed did he himself go for a bath.’ A wife told us that her husband encouraged her to wear a *Salwar Kameez* (a north Indian outfit with loose pants and a long flowing top), whereas the custom for daughter-in-law is to wear a *Sari* and practice *purdah*. While she is not in a position to go against the customs of her marital village, her husband could bend the rules.

Mr Sharma, a village elder and teacher had broadened his understanding of male responsibilities. For him, a man ‘symbolizes strength and knowledge...he carries the family, society and nation’s burdens upon his shoulders.’ Additionally, he stated that a man’s responsibilities include helping in domestic chores, ‘I wash my children’s clothes—be it my daughter or my son—and arrange them after washing. People who see me doing such work learn by observing me.’ In a group discussion with men in one of the villages, some men shared that though cooking was primarily a female duty, some men helped out with it:

Participant A: Some men do help. Particularly those who have many children, they certainly help. People are ashamed to tell others but in reality they do help.

Moderator: Do they help with the cooking like chopping vegetables?

Participant B: Yes they do help but do not tell it to the public.

Participants' spatial and social locations shape and are shaped by their role performances. For instance, Uday Singh explained that in this particular village, men do not typically help their wives in household work: 'Outside [of this village] this is considered to be very good, but here when a man does household chores, it is not considered to be good. Everyone in the village will come to know about it and mock him for it.' Performing an alternative masculinity and disrupting traditional spatial boundaries is difficult, and not without potential personal costs.

DISCUSSION

Hooks (1984) argued that critical thought based on 'lived theorizing' can close the gap between theory and practice. In other words, theory can function as critical intervention. We hope our reading of development theorizing and our case study of *Taru* provides space for imagining feminist futures that can be lived differently. Several scholars and practitioners have raised concerns about the inclusion of men in development activities seeking to empower women (Greig et al. 2000; Sweetman 2001). They question if (and how) men can be included in GAD initiatives without diverting already scarce funding from women, and without compromising the advancement of women. Our initial assessment of the *Taru* initiative provides hope that men and women can engage in collective and emancipatory projects and resist patterns of hegemony and domination. When approached from a GAD standpoint, development agendas embrace contradiction and irony as valuable resources for theorizing and praxis, and *include both men and women*.

The discourses of *Taru*, when read with postcolonial feminist sensibilities, provided fertile ground for making visible the ongoing, discursive struggles through which multiple, shifting, and in some ways, contradictory, masculinities and femininities intersect. Through the varied dimensions of the *Taru* initiative, we saw both men and women openly critique those seemingly 'natural', common sense assumptions that privilege the self at the expense of the other and work to reify spatial domains and social relations. Yet, resisting predispositions about gendered spaces is a difficult task and resistance was ever present. For instance, we experienced resistance from some parents who did not want their daughters to participate in the theatre workshops and perform in public. It was only after we reframed the workshops as

a ‘cultural event’ (in which more girls traditionally participate) did we garner more support and trust from parents. Moreover, during the participatory theatre performances, we asked boys and men to move to the back of the audience in order to allow women and girls to sit in the front. We restructured the space to disrupt traditional norms. Scholars–practitioners can help to understand how participants negotiate such tensions, and in so doing help participants create empowering socio-spatial dynamics.

We urge development scholars and practitioners to foreground relations between space and identity. Deeply entrenched forces work to fix the meaning of particular spaces (for example, the public is the man’s world), endowing spaces with fixed identities that include and exclude individuals. Yet, within the clearings partially created by *Taru*-related discourses, we witnessed ruptures and fissures in which men and women, girls and boys, were struggling to alter the socio-spatial landscape. Participants’ narratives, in their myriad forms, render visible the situated practices of space through which identities are (re)produced and resisted. Spaces (for example, schools) call into being particular social relations even as social relations rearticulate spaces. Freedom and restriction in movement and mobility as well as fixed and fluid spatial boundaries enable and constrain particular social relations and gendered identities among these Bihar residents.

Participants’ narratives remind us that place and context are central to understanding gendered identity—gender is rooted in social and geographical spaces. We see that gender inherently is a situated phenomenon and cannot be understood in a cultural and spatial vacuum. Future work also should delve into how multiple discourses of difference unfold in material and social structures as individuals engage in everyday micro-practices. Our reading of the discourses, guided by postcolonial feminist sensibilities, revealed how women from different castes experienced mobility and spatial boundaries differently. Indeed, caste stratification, one among many factors influencing individuals’ lived standpoints, appears to be intricately woven with socio-spatial norms. We hear through our participants’ voices that GAD initiatives can become deeply contested sites where hegemonic gender, caste and spatial norms are simultaneously rearticulated and reinforced.

Chant (2000: 8) asserted that the exclusion of men ‘deprives gender interventions of their transformative potentials’. Excluding men potentially may increase the work burden on women and undermine the overall inefficacy of development efforts aimed at women. Our study was conceived of as a response to such calls for male inclusion in GAD theory–praxis. In doing so, we worked to highlight the critical role men can and do play in GAD initiatives and reiterate the need for men to be addressed and included in gender and development work. In addition, our study exemplifies how men and women and the varied masculinities and femininities

they embody remain highly relational and intertwined and cannot be understood in isolation. As feminist scholars and practitioners committed to gender equality, not only do we *need to include* men, we *cannot* possibly exclude them.

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