Exploring the Nature of Gender Equitable Attitudes among Ghanaian Men: Why do some Men Reject the Patriarchal Dividend?

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Gender inequality in sub-Saharan Africa has far-reaching demographic implications; fertility, mortality, sexual behavior, and domestic violence are all affected by men's traditional decision-making power in the household. However, because the preponderance of research on gender in sub-Saharan Africa examines women's perspectives, we do not know the full extent to which African men endorse gender equity, the basis of their resistance, and the best approaches to gaining men's support for greater gender equity. This study uses a mixed-methods approach to examine how some men in Ghana develop more equitable gender attitudes. Using both the 2003 Ghana DHS and 33 in-depth interviews with gender equitable Ghanaian men, this study explores the natal family dynamics that encourage men to develop an awareness for women's power, and empathy for women's experiences, both of which contribute to gender equitable attitudes among Ghanaian men.

No world region experiences greater gender inequality than sub-Saharan Africa. According to the UNDP's gender-related development index, sub-Saharan African countries represent an astounding 32 out of the 33 most gender unequal countries in the world[1](Watkins 2005). Scholars and practitioners alike assert that an attenuation of gender inequity in Africa is crucial for further development on the continent, and significant foreign assistance and multiple international policy initiatives are already directed toward the rectification of inequalities between men and women.

Yet despite considerable international attention to gender issues in Africa, men's perspectives are largely absent from the discourse on gender inequality on the continent (Connell 2003; Miescher 2005; Morrell and Ouzgane 2005). Almost by definition, men in gender unequal societies hold considerable authority, and any lasting shift in the gendered distribution of power in Africa requires the support of men. Yet we do not know the full extent to which men endorse greater gender equity, the basis of their resistance (Goode 1992), and the best approaches to gaining men's support for greater gender equity. In the discourse, men are often treated as homogenously problematic and resistant, rather than as a potential source of support for equality and gender focused policies. Particularly in developing country contexts where research funding is limited, men are problematized in ways that ignore the considerable variability of gender attitudes among boys and men (Guttman 1996). An exploration of the experiences of men who hold relatively gender equitable perspectives may reveal some of the pieces of male dominant ideology that are most amenable to change, and may therefore provide

[1]The UNDP's gender-related development index is a composite index that compares inequalities between men and women using four measures: life expectancy at birth; adult literacy rate; primary, secondary, and tertiary school enrollment rates; and estimated earned income. 140 countries (for which data were available) were included in this ranking.

guidance as to where crucial intervention points exist for shaping greater gender equitable attitudes among other men.

In order to offer a constructive commentary on current gender-related programmatic interventions, and inform policies that aim to cultivate greater gender equitable attitudes among men, this paper examines the natal family dynamics that contribute to the development of gender equitable attitudes among Ghanaian men. Specifically, through a mixed-methods approach that utilizes both the 2003 Ghana Demographic and Health Surveys (GDHS) and 33 in-depth interviews with gender equitable Ghanaian men, this study provides evidence that gender equitable Ghanaian men have family experiences that elicit two critical responses: an awareness of women's power, and empathy for women's experiences. While family experiences are central to the development and solidification of men and women's gender attitudes (Booth and Amato 1994), family influences alone do not dictate adult gender attitudes. However, this paper does examine an important component of men's early life experiences that can lead to gender equitable attitudes.

BACKGROUND

Gender inequality is pervasive in traditional Ghanaian culture; men hold the preponderance of power in government, the local economy, and particularly in traditional households (Adams and Castle 1994; Salm and Falola 2002). Ghanaian women not only have less opportunity to go to school and are less likely to be literate than their male counterparts, but they also earn less income (Watkins 2005). And, according to this measure, inequalities between men and women in Ghana are more disparate than 73% of 140 countries worldwide (Watkins 2005). Beyond the obvious social and economic

consequences for women, gender inequity has additional far-reaching implications, influencing fertility, mortality, sexual activity, and domestic violence among other things (Caldwell 1990; DeRose, Dodoo, and Patil 2002; Dodoo and van Landewijk 1996).

Sub-Saharan Africa has also experienced some of the most significant demographic crises of contemporary times: momentous population growth, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and expansive and rapid urbanization. Thus, more so than many other social science disciplines, demographic research has a presence in sub-Saharan Africa (Dodoo and Biesel 2005), and as a result, it has a significant influence on both international policy and the allocation of foreign assistance on the continent. Despite demography's laudable efforts to address Africa's population-related barriers to development, the discipline is often criticized for neglecting the contextual elements and power relations critical to the study of gender (McDaniel 1996; Riley 1998; Riley 1999) This weakness is significant; the policy recommendations regarding gender inequality set forth by the demographic discourse often lack a culturally- and theoretically-grounded perspective.

Africa's contemporary history of marginalization in the global sphere has greatly compromised the traditional processes through which boys achieve manhood. Historically, Ghanaian men gained status through becoming community leaders within ethnic group hierarchies, garnering financial success, or marrying women and bearing many children (Miescher 2005). Colonization disempowered traditional forms of community leadership; men who may have previously gained status through holding traditional leadership positions were less able to do so, as these systems lost political power. In more recent decades, globalization processes have severely hampered

economic growth on the continent, thus hindering men's abilities to achieve adult masculinity status through financial success (Miescher 2005). Also, African men face additional marginalization due to their location as the "other" in regard to race and economic power on the global level (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005). Because African men have been marginalized through colonization, globalization, and their subordinate position in global power systems, African masculine forms contain significant fluidity and are complicated by the intersections of these subordinate statuses (Cornwall 2003).

Simultaneously, the vast majority of Ghanaian men benefit from gender inequality. As demonstrated by the UNDP's gender and development measure discussed above, Ghanaian boys have more opportunities for education, and achieve better employment outcomes. However, beyond these entrenched public sphere benefits, men also garner benefits within the domestic and family context. In part because the traditional means to masculinity through ethnic leadership positions and economic success have been curtailed, men often assert male dominance most strongly in the family sphere. African marital institutions (including traditional allocations of gendered power) are not highly amenable to change; the failure of colonizers' attempts to westernize African marriage systems demonstrates the strength and persistence of the institution (Miescher 2005). For example, despite strong efforts to eliminate polygyny, one-third of marriages in Ghana are currently polygynous (Manuh 1997), and 40% of marriages in West Africa are the same (Gage 1994). The domestic sphere is also determined at the individual level and not structural level. Thus, men have the greatest ability to embrace or contest hegemonic masculinity in this arena; some men may choose to reframe domestic roles while others adhere to traditional systems of gendered power.

According to RW Connell (2005), multiple forms of masculinity are manifested within any cultural system of male dominance. However, there is often one hegemonic form of masculinity that is promulgated by men who have the power to shape the dominant cultural and economic practices that perpetuate women's subordination. While only a small percentage of men are able to achieve this position of gendered power, the "claim to authority" exhibited by these men has significant implications for the divisions of gender power for all men and women (Connell 2005:17). Hegemonic masculinity, even when embodied by only a small group of men, can be so omnipresent that it in fact becomes culturally "mute" and invisible (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:29).

The vast majority of men, who do not achieve hegemonic masculinity status, often continue to be complicit in the subordination of women (Connell 2005). Although these men may not actively participate in the direct discrimination against or oppression of women, they reap the benefits created through structural systems of inequality (Connell 1987; Connell 2005). For example, if families prioritize the education of sons over daughters, boys experience a culturally-supported advantage over their female siblings, an advantage which they do not control. Thus, it is difficult for individual men to reject the gendered benefits that stem from economic and educational inequalities. However, in the domestic sphere, adult Ghanaian men do have considerable leeway to negotiate their domestic sphere authority. As the traditional household head, men may work to assert significant dominance over their wives and children, or aspire toward more equitable relations with their spouses.

Marginalized men who rest at the intersections of gender/race/and class stratification may not have full access to the patriarchal dividend, as do hegemonic and

complicit men (Connell 2005; Morrell 1998). In some sense, the vast majority of African men are caught within these intersections, whether through international economic marginalization or racial "otherness." However, even though many African men experience an "other" status as a result of economic and racial marginalization, this sense of relative disempowerment carries less significance within the home, where other adult men are not likely to be present. In fact, hegemonic masculinity in the household sphere can be so omnipresent that women support male dominance to a higher degree than men themselves, as can be seen in women's staggeringly high acceptance of domestic violence.

Within a male dominant context, how do men actually develop more gender equitable attitudes? Harry Christian's (1994) qualitative research with men's anti-sexist groups in England found that gender-equal men are most often shaped through exposure to a particularly strong female role model (embodying gender-equal attitudes) during youth, or experience an intimate relationship or close friendship with an empowered female later in adult life. According to his study, intimate connection with women possessing gender-equal beliefs is required for men to shift their gendered world views. Similarly, Barker and Loewenstein (1997) found among a group of low-income young men in Rio de Janeiro, that despite prevalent machista attitudes, young men with meaningful relationships with women role models who promoted nontraditional attitudes were crucial to questioning hegemonic masculinity. In addition, Barker (2000) argues that men who have a particularly competency from which they draw self-esteem (such as a particular skill, talent, or secure employment) are better positioned to counter prevailing notions of masculinity. This study explores these findings in further detail, to determine

the types of childhood experiences that can cultivate an awareness of women's power and empathy for women's experiences—two perspectives that contribute to gender equitable attitudes among Ghanaian men.

METHODS

This project utilizes a mixed methods design, whereby quantitative and qualitative research components are combined to more fully address the research purposes of the study. (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). During three months of fieldwork in Ghana (October 2007 to January 2008) I conducted 33 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with Ghanaian men who hold gender equitable attitudes. Of these men, 18 were recommended to me by three academic and non-academic women leaders of the women's rights movement in Ghana, who identified men they believed were uniquely gender equitable. The remaining 15 respondents were identified through a snowball sampling technique, where the initial respondents recommended additional gender equitable men. During the interviewer's (the author) initial contact with the respondents, respondents were informed of the nature of the study, and asked if they considered themselves to be more gender equitable than most Ghanaian men. In this way, respondents were identified as gender equitable by another gender equitable individual, and then self-identified as gender equitable before the in-depth interview.

Respondents spanned in age from their early 30s to mid-60s, with ten respondents in their 30s, 13 respondents in their 40s, and the final ten in their 50s and 60s. A large majority of respondents (26) were married, while four were divorced, one was engaged, and two of the respondents in their early 30s had never been married. Despite the small size of this sample, the five largest ethnic groups of Ghana were represented (Akan, Ga,

Ewe, Dagomba and Guan) in relatively similar proportions to the population, and respondents spent their childhoods in regions all across the country. While the majority of respondents were Christian (including Catholics, Pentecostals, and Protestants, among others) a minority of respondents were Muslim, and number of respondents did not identify as religiously affiliated, although most of these men were raised in a Christian church. The parents of respondents also had diverse economic backgrounds; while some respondents came from rural villages and had parents who were illiterate farmers, other respondents had one parent or two in the civil service (teacher, postmaster) or military (Navy).

Because the starting point of the snowball sampling design was three women leaders of the women's rights movement—all of whom had achieved high educational and economic statuses—the gender equitable respondents interviewed for this research also reflected these high statuses, as they were the friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and partners of these women. While the education and employment levels of respondents are not reflective of the larger population of Ghanaian men—respondents had achieved greater economic success than most men—respondents did come from diverse family backgrounds. However, because this research focuses on the childhood experiences of respondents, their adult economic and educational statuses are less relevant. While we cannot separate respondents childhood experiences from their later schooling, work, and social interactions—life experiences are cumulative, and these later influences could change men's reflections about the past—because of the diversity of respondent's backgrounds, these findings may have broader application to boys and men with lower levels of educational and economic achievement in Ghana. Conversely, these findings

may be constrained by this sampling procedure because respondents may actually have an easier time hold gender equitable attitudes, as their higher statuses may buffer them from marginalization and social pressures to enact hegemonic masculinities.

I anticipated encountering validity threats to these in-depth interviews as a result of my outsider statuses as both a White American and a female; because respondents would be briefed on the research topic prior to the interview, I anticipated a bias toward equitable attitudes among respondents. In other words, respondents could potentially provide socially sanctioned responses, instead of truthfully discussing their gender attitudes. While these dynamics may have occurred to some degree within these interviews—without a comparison to interviews with a Ghanaian male interviewer, this is hard to determine—a few situations occurred during the data collection that suggest that perhaps my outsider status did not greatly hinder these data, and may have profited them in some ways.

During the first few IDIs, it became apparent that these respondents did not feel threatened by me—any power dynamics that could have occurred as a result of our differing ethnicities and nationalities did not come to fruition. Instead, respondents treated me as an outsider who 'needed educating' on the ways of Ghana. Additionally, because of my age at the time of interview (29), all of the respondents were older than myself, balancing out any potential power dynamics. Second, respondents did not appear to provide socially sanctioned responses; they had strong opinions about gender roles which they thought were the truth, and thus did not work to disguise or temper these. For example, one respondent, who possibly held the least equitable attitudes among respondents in this sample, argued that "women incite domestic violence," and should not

respond to men's anger with additional anger, as men cannot control their reactions. While this same respondent agreed that domestic violence is never condoned, this opinion suggests that he did not tailor his responses to me—he truly believed that God made men and women differently, and that women should remain calm when men become angry. In another interview, my outsider status benefitted the data; the respondent was extremely hesitant to discuss religious influences on gender inequality until I repeatedly assured him of the confidentiality of the interview. He was afraid other Ghanaians would hear his opinions and be offended, as many Ghanaians are highly religious. He assumed that, because I am American, I am likely to be less religious that most Ghanaians, and therefore he worried less about offending me. As a result, he spoke very freely about how he believed that Christianity and Islam promote women's oppression and poverty. It is unlikely that he would have shared this perspective if I were a Ghanaian.

The analysis of the in-depth interviews was a multi-step process that followed grounded theory techniques (Creswell 1998). First, I read each interview and took detailed notes in the margins of the transcripts, and then compiled these notes into a 2-page summary for each respondent. In this way, I could more easily examine the complex set of experiences that interacted over each respondent's life course to shape their uniquely gender equitable attitudes. After this process, I used an open coding technique to code the transcripts of the in-depth interviews (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and identify emerging themes. I made refinements to these analyses through a second coding process, at which point inductive hypotheses could be further investigated.

Verification of IDI Respondent Sampling

In order to verify the success of my snowball sampling technique, and determine whether the in-depth interview respondents reflect more gender equitable attitudes than most Ghanaian men, I compare a 14-question gender attitudinal survey with the IDI respondents to the identical questions within the 2003 GDHS. Linking the data in this way strengthens the generalizability of the qualitative findings and the "sense making" of the quantitative findings. The IDIs build a retrospective history of respondents' gender attitudes over the life course, in order to elucidate influential experiences that shape the emergence of men's gender equitable attitudes. In this manner, the quantitative findings create a backdrop for the attitudes and opinions expressed by IDI respondents.

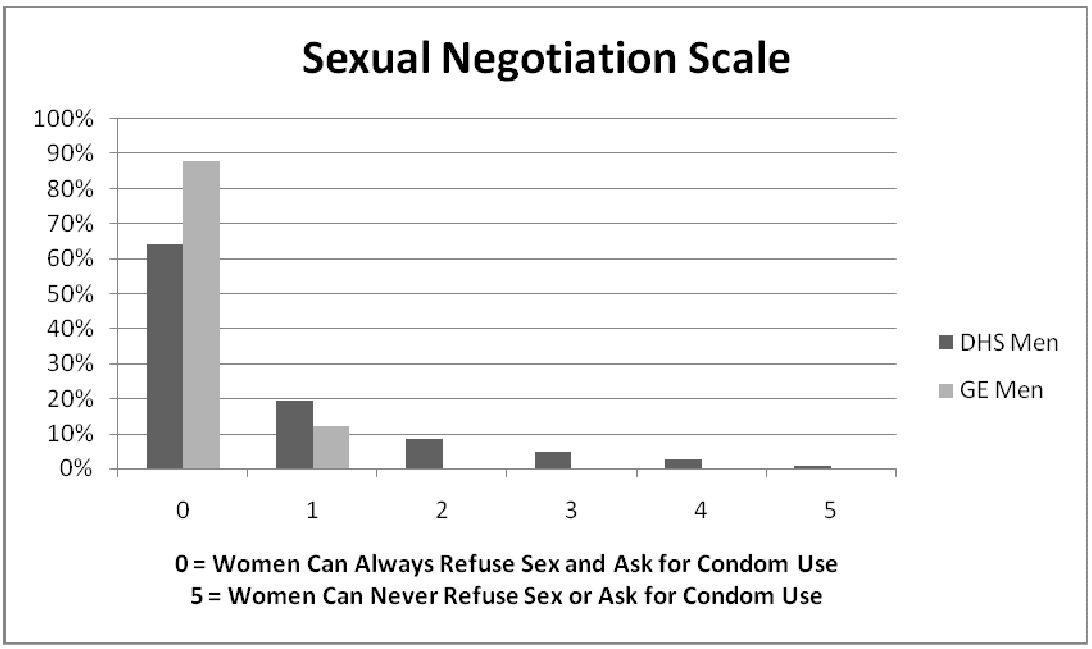
Prior to the in-depth interviews, each of the 33 respondents completed a short survey of 14 questions that quantified the extent of their gender equitable attitudes. The survey questions were identical to those utilized within the male survey of the 2003 GDHS, which included a random sample of 5015 Ghanaian men. The short survey included five questions regarding domestic violence: "Is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations?" when the situations included: if she goes out without telling him, if she neglects the children, if she refuses to have sex with him, and if she burns the food. The survey also included four questions that measured men's attitudes toward women's sexual decision making, "Is a wife justified in refusing sex with her husband when": she knows her husband has a sexually transmitted disease, she knows her husband has sex with women other than his wife(s), she has recently given birth, and she is tired and not in the mood. Respondents were also asked if a woman is justified in asking her husband to use a condom if she knows he has a sexually transmitted disease. The final questions examined men's attitudes toward men's

responses to wives' refusal of sex in four scenarios: "If a woman refuses sex with her husband when he wants her to, he has the right to": get angry and reprimand her, refuse to give her money or other means of financial support, use force and have sex with her, or go and have sex with another woman.

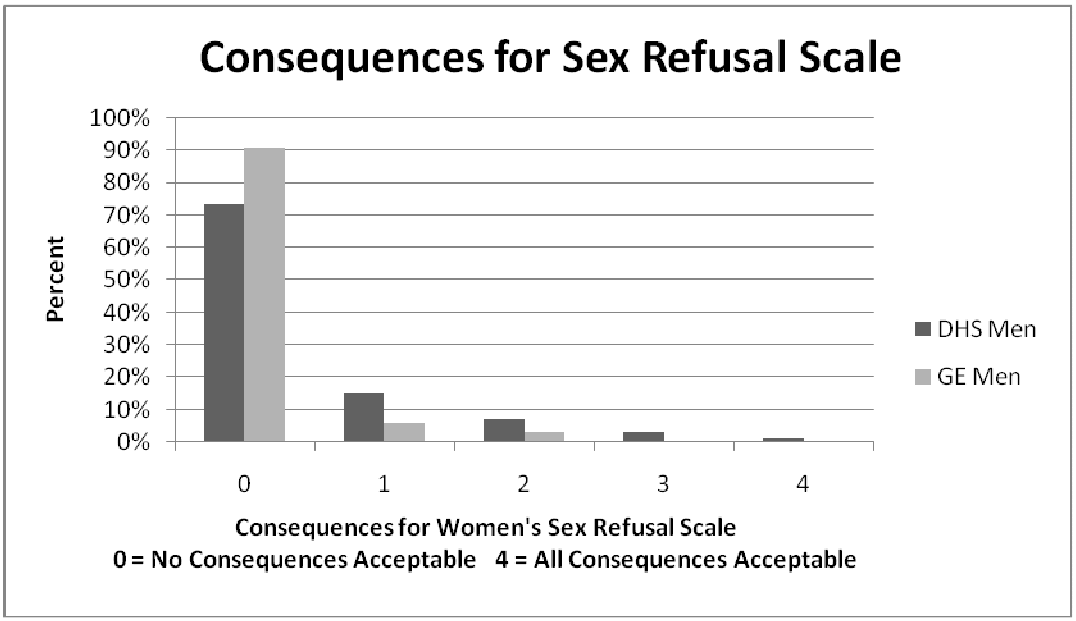
To compare the gender attitudes of in-depth interview respondents and the nationally representative sample of men in the GDHS 2003, I created three additive attitudinal scales, one of which includes the five survey questions on attitudes toward domestic violence. The second scale consists of the four questions on attitudes toward women's sexual decision making and the question regarding women's condom negotiation described above. The final scale includes the four questions on attitudes toward men's responses toward wives' refusal of sex.

In a comparison of respondent's gender attitudes with the gender attitudes of men surveyed by the 2003 GDHS, as represented by these three additive scales, distinctive differences emerge. In the following graphs, a score of zero equals the most equitable attitudes within each scale, while the highest value represents the most male dominant attitudes on the scale. (For example, on the domestic violence scale, a respondent who said that domestic violence was not permitted in any of the five scenarios would score a zero, while someone who condoned violence in all scenarios would score a 5.) It is evident from the following graphs that the qualitative sample of gender equitable men—described as gender equitable men (GE Men) below—holds markedly different attitudes from the random sample of men in the GDHS.

Only 67% of male respondents in the DHS reject a man's use of domestic violence against his wife in all of the following scenarios: if she goes out without telling him, if she neglects the children, if she refuses to have sex with him, and if she burns the food. However, 100% of the in-depth interview respondents (GE men) reject violence in every scenario.



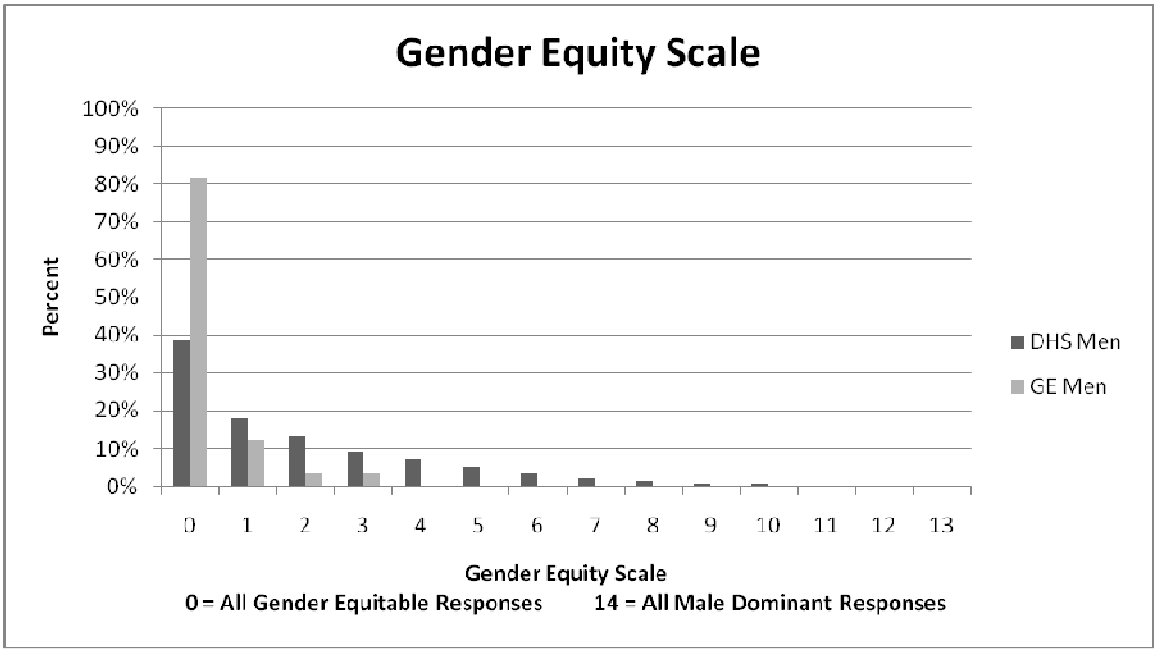
Similarly, only 64% of DHS men feel that a woman can ask her husband to use a condom if she knows he has an STD, and can refuse sex with her husband in all of the following scenarios: she knows her husband has a sexually transmitted disease, she knows her husband has sex with women other than his wife(s), she has recently given birth, and she is tired and not in the mood. In contrast, 88% of the GE respondents agree that women can refuse sex in all of these scenarios, and ask her husband to use a condom if she knows he has an STD.



In the final additive scale, 74% of DHS men agreed that if a wife refused sex with her husband, a man could not respond in any of the following ways: get angry and reprimand her, refuse to give her money or other means of financial support, use force and have sex with her, or go and have sex with another woman. In contrast, 91% of GE men thought that a husband could not respond to his wife's refusal of sex in any of these ways.

Differences between the DHS men and in-depth interview respondents (GE men) are not only apparent within these three additive scales. If these three scales are combined into one large additive scale of 14 questions, differences between these two samples of

men are even sharper. Only 39% of men in the GDHS give the gender equitable response on all of the 14 survey questions (rejecting violence, condoning women's ability to refuse sex, and refusing men's retaliatory consequences for women's refusal of sex) while 82% of the GE men hold gender equitable attitudes across all of these measures. Because the three smaller additive scales capture different dimensions of gender attitudes (as proven by a factor analysis of the DHS measures) it is only when these scales are combined that the largest differences between these samples are evident. In other words, while a number of men hold gender equitable attitudes in one sphere, but not in others, the in-depth interview respondents are more gender equitable across all the dimensions of gender attitudes.



Additionally, because the DHS is a nationally-representative, randomly sampled survey, a 95% confidence interval for the mean of each of these gender attitudinal scales can be calculated. For example, the mean for the domestic violence scale is 0.81, and the 95% confidence interval for this mean is 0.77 to 0.85, with determines that there is a 95%

chance that the mean for this scale for larger population of Ghanaian men would fall between these values. However, the mean for the GE men on this scale is zero, and far outside of these bounds. Likewise, on each of the gender attitudinal scales presented here, the mean value for the GE men falls below—or more equitable than—the 95% confidence interval for the DHS. As a result of these comparisons, the successful sampling of gender equitable Ghanaian men in the in-depth interview sample is confirmed.

FINDINGS

The following section discusses the family experiences that contribute to the cultivation of gender equitable attitudes among gender equitable Ghanaian men. While the experiences themselves are essential to the shaping of gender attitudes—for example, witnessing specific types of interactions between mothers and fathers—the reactions that respondents have to these experiences are equally as important. Therefore, this section describes how dynamics within the family can lead respondents to develop a greater awareness of women's power, and a greater sense of empathy for women's experiences. While earlier research including Christian (1994) Barker and Lowenstein (1997) discusses the necessity of close relationships with women in order to develop gender equitable attitudes in male dominant contexts, these findings go a step further, and propose that childhood interactions with both men and women can elicit these two types of responses, and can ultimately contribute to the cultivation of more gender equitable attitudes.

Awareness of Women's Power

While respondents have diverse backgrounds, and characterize their childhood experiences and relationships with parents in many ways, a number of respondents had relationships with women and men role models (generally mothers and fathers) that allowed them to fully appreciate the extent of women's power, competencies, and autonomy. Because respondents came of age in a cultural context where women's contributions to their families and communities (both in terms of ideas and opinions, as well as formal and informal labor and housework) were generally highly undervalued, experiences that allowed respondents to fully appreciate women's capabilities were incredibly shaping. While family dynamics that could be characterized as gender equitable—where parents shared decision-making power and authority in the household—created this experience for many respondents, gender equity within the natal family was not a prerequisite for this type of experience. Some respondents came from single-headed households where their mothers also demonstrated the full range of their capabilities, and still other respondents saw their mothers rebel against subordination imposed by fathers or other men, thus causing respondents to more fully appreciate women's power. The distribution of household chores—frequently organized by mothers—became a venue for respondents to experience their mother's authority, particularly if mothers forced their sons to do chores that are generally considered girls' work.

Mothers' Personalities

For many respondents, their mothers' strong personalities made them quite powerful in the home, and these traits interacted with fathers' more relaxed attitudes to

cultivated gender equitable attitudes in the home as well as respondents' awareness of women's power:

> My mom for example, I wouldn't describe her as a feminist in any sense at all, but she's always been—for her time, for her age, for her generation, for her circumstances—a confident person. She is very assertive and won't take crap from my dad or from anybody, simply because he was [a man]. I think that was important when the other evidence around me did not necessarily suggest that women will always behave that way.
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> My mom was a little bit strong; in fact she was the disciplinarian in the home. My dad didn't—he was very cool. I don't remember growing up ever being caned by my dad. But my mom has beaten us up several times, I mean she was the disciplinarian. All of us, we were more fearful of my mom.

However, in other families, even though fathers felt as though they were the head of the household, mothers were able to subvert their traditional male authority, and as a result, demonstrate their capabilities as women to their sons. For example, due to this mother's implicit assertiveness and power, this respondent recognized who was really in charge in his family:

> My dad thought he was the head of the house hold like most men do … [But] it didn't really matter what he thought. He would actually change his position. It's like the chieftaincy system, when it was being practiced properly. The chief was just a figurehead. The queen mother was the most senior female in the lineage of the chief, and [my mother] had the chief under her thumb.

For another respondent, his mother's power was more over. She openly rebelled against traditional gender roles when she chose to leave her marriage and start her own business, leaving the respondent and his siblings behind. The father could not make her stay, and the respondent witnessed his father's sadness at the end of the marriage:

> I keep telling people that my mother was the first feminist. My mother was a very strong woman with a lot of talent, and she wouldn't stomach a lot of nonsense. At one point when she felt [like doing so] she left my dad. She went and set up a business of her own. That's it, she moved on—she always moved on to do things. The old man cried his eyes out.

Mothers—and in one of the cases below, a grandmother—also showed their power and capabilities by living independent of men, and running their own households:

> I lived with my grandmother, and I saw her as a symbol of determination and I did not think that my grandmother was inferior to any man … In her village, there was no question about women activism or something like that, but what was important is that my grandmother was the head of a household, she was responsible for it. She took care of the house. By the time I was growing up, her husband died and she never married again, so she was in charge.

> In my family women are hardworking—women don't depend on men to survive. I think traditionally men take care of women financially, but in my house we never saw that … At the time my father passed away, I was in a single female parent household … For me, my mother performed male roles like breadwinner and disciplinarian.

Equitable Fathers and Family Dynamics

While these mothers either subverted or actively rebelled against traditional gender roles imposed by men, or lived in their own single-headed households, independent of men, some fathers contributed to respondents' respect for women's authority. These fathers encouraged their sons to appreciate women's capabilities by providing gender equitable role modeling within the family, through soliciting advice from their wives, and respecting women's opinions and ideas:

> You know my father, before he would do anything, he would consult with my mother, and my mother would give him input before [he acted]. Normally, men were "on top of the relationships."

> Unlike typical a Ghanaian society, there was so much respect for the women. My mother was a very strong woman, and my father really respected my mother in all decisions, and never treated her like you would find commonly in our social settings. So I grew up with that kind of understanding.

In some families where mothers and fathers had equitable decision making, there was also a unique element of equity among all members of the household that allowed respondents and their siblings to voice their own opinions, and be treated fairly within the

family. In this way, not only were women given equal respect in these households, but children, who are generally given little authority as a result of traditional age hierarchies, were also given a voice:

> My support for women's rights, I think in a way it started from my family because I had a family where my father never shouted at my mother. When there was an issue in the house, even when I was in high school, 6th form, when there was a problem between my mother and my father, we would sit down together as a family. I could tell my father that, he was not right. I could tell my mom that she was not right. I had parents who were that open.
>
> [My parents] discussed things a lot. I remember when we were growing up, sometimes they would involve us in major decisions. When we were a little grown up, about sixth form, they would involve us in major decisions.

Equal Chores for Boys and Girls

For other respondents, mothers demonstrated their power within their households by implementing a distribution of household chores that required boys to do chores that were traditionally girls' work:

> I belong to a family of women. We are two boys and the rest are women. My mother was and is a strong woman. So that the family dynamics, my upbringing, there was not much distinction between what a man does and what a woman does. I did the dishes, I swept at the compound house, I threw the refuse away at the compost heap on my head, I went to go and sell on the street like my sisters … [My mother] would make sure you did what you were supposed to do.

While the act of doing girls' chores can also help boys develop empathy for women's experiences, the ways in which some mothers instituted equal chore assignments between boys and girls—and readily punished boys for not obeying, even though they saw their age-mates in neighboring houses do no chores at all—gave respondents a unique respect for women's authority and power, despite any gendered entitlements they may have expected over their sisters:

> [My mother] was the boss. According to my mother, if today you are supposed to fetch four buckets [of water] and you fail to fetch four, tomorrow you will fetch

> eight, and the following day if you refuse, you will fetch twelve. Unless you were ill, you will do it.

As this respondent describes it, although he wanted to rebel against his assigned chores, in the end, his mother's authority required him to comply:

> There is no way I can sit here today and say that there wasn't some resentment at some time. There was some unwillingness on my part because I could see around [the village] that these were not the [chores] that I should be doing [as a boy]. So sometimes, depending on who was there, I would try to resist. I saw my friends, and they were not doing [girl's work]. But my mother would persevere. And because I had come to see my safety, security, and comfort as connected to the home, I only had a very limited choice. So I would protest, but I would realize there was not much I could do—I would get sanctions for disobeying.

Mothers had different motivations for instituting equal chore distributions among boys and girls. Many established equal chore distributions out of fairness, while other mothers saw chores as a means of empowering both their boys and girls with the ability to live independent lives:

> My mother wanted to make sure that everybody was capable of managing his or her home and therefore she wanted everybody to have the feel of what it is to do domestic chores.

Mothers not only assigned equal chores for boys and girls, but gave their boys the same mentoring in how to do the tasks.

> I remember a time I when was learning to wash, and she kept an eye on me just like she was doing with the females, and she gave the same tutorials.

In this way, gender equitable chores among siblings became a means through which mothers demonstrated their own power within the home. Respondents had no choice but to obey their mother's chore assignments, despite witnessing the highly inequitable distributions of chores in neighboring houses and families that benefitted their male friends.

Empathy for Women's Experiences

Respondents were also exposed to a number of family circumstances that helped them to develop empathy for the experiences of women and girls. Many respondents saw serious difficulties fall on their mother's shoulders—from domestic violence in the household to extreme economic circumstances—and identified with their mothers through these experiences. Other respondents developed greater empathy for girls and women through developing uniquely close relationships with their mothers. Additionally, respondents who came from households with very few daughters often had to do many of the chores that are usually reserved for girls. This lead some respondents to empathize with the hard work that women and girls complete in the household.

Economic Difficulty

For this respondent, whose father was a local chief who died when the respondent was 12 years old, he saw the economic standing of the family plummet after his father's death, as his mother was no longer married to a chief:

> You are okay when your father is alive, as a so-called prince, but when he is dead, the equation changes so dramatically that you can become really poor immediately because your mother is not regarded.

Similarly, another respondent deliberately wanted to be different than most men, and wanted to be supportive of women, because he recognized that his mother did not receive the financial support from his father that she deserved. This respondent had a similar reaction to his father's neglect of the family; from an extremely young age, he became self-sufficient, so that he could remove some of the burdens from his mother. Even though his father was technically present, he describes his household as a single-parent home:

> Though my father was rich, because of our system of inheritance, he decided not to take care of my family … my father was from the matrilineal side. Because he was not going to benefit from us, he rather concerned himself with the children of the uncles. He had the money alright, but he didn't care. . . So, the long and short of it all is that even at age 11, I started taking care of myself. My mother was a seamstress, but she didn't have much work, so I had to really fend for myself. I would go to the farm, I would produce food stuffs, make baskets to sell, to make money to take care of myself.

Domestic Violence

For two respondents, their mothers experienced extreme domestic violence at the hands of their fathers. This respondent remembers wanting to retaliate against his father's violence at the young age of seven:

> I saw everything. We were always scared in the home. The way he just beat my mother on any trivial issue—he would just beat her like his child—it was not fair. It was not the best of situations at all … At one point, when my father was treating my mother like that, I was just telling myself, if I could grow, I would beat my father on behalf of my mother.

This respondent remembers being in the middle of his parents' conflict. His mother was kicked out of the family home on multiple occasions:

> My mother would be driven out and I would have to be the one to carry her luggage out of the home and bring the same luggage back when my father [calmed down]. And, it's something I hated.

As a result, this respondent became very close to his mother. He felt incredible empathy for her situation, and yet could do nothing to prevent his father's abuse. Subsequently, he and his siblings were very supportive of their mother, and resistant to their father:

> We were all over her because she was our only support, you know? We were compelled by the situation to stay beside her. So we would do the cooking together, we would wash the bowls together. But whatever we had to do for my father was by force. He wouldn't persuade you to do anything, everything would be by force. And that was the difference.

These traumatic experiences with violence, which ended when his father died when he was 19, continue to strengthen his connection to his mother, and perpetuate resentment to his now-deceased father:

> The pain is sitting in my heart. Even now, I keep blaming my dad for whatever is happening to my mother today. Anytime she complains of being sick and so on. I still cannot imagine that all of [the violence] is not contributing to it, although my father is dead.

Relationship Closeness

Respondents also developed very close relationships with their mothers and sisters, and as a result, had greater empathy for women's experiences. For this respondent, because his mother required that he help with household chores like cooking, he had the time to build a closer relationship with her than most of his peers experienced with their mothers:

> I used to be with my mom in the kitchen preparing the dishes. One thing I remember, I didn't have much time to go out to play with my guys like my peers did, because around that time, around 3:00, I'd be at home helping my mom.

For another respondent, his closeness with his mother made him want to please her. He would go to the market with her, despite the teasing he received from his peers, in an effort to be a good son:

> I remember even in my primary/secondary school days, we would go to the market together, and my friends and brothers would tease me. Even at the market, you would see me carrying my mother's basket …Before I finished secondary school; I was the best buyer, everybody asked me to go to the market for them.

Families with No Girls

Alternatively, some respondents attribute their empathy for women's experiences in part to the chores they had to do at home. Unlike the respondents above, who experienced equal chore distributions because of their mother's deliberate creation of

these roles, these boys had to do chores because of circumstances—there were no girls in the household to do these chores. Even though these arrangements were not strategic on the part of parents, they still created a sense of empathy within boys:

> My mother had only one girl among us. It meant that we had to do everything in the house. We had to go for water, go for firewood, go to the kitchen, do the cooking. All these household chores, absolutely [the chores] were for us the boys, because there was no girl amongst us.

This respondent was the oldest of 10 children, and the first girl was the 6th child, and not born until he was 15 years old. In addition to his heavy chore load, as the oldest, he also had caretaking responsibilities for his younger siblings, and he helped his mother brew pito, a traditional beer that only women are suppose to brew. In fact, he and his brothers would lie to customers when they had brewed the beer:

> We were my mother's girls. We helped her to do everything. So, I can cook anything—any of our traditional dishes. Even the locally brewed beer. I know how to do it …Men never do it. It's one of the prohibitions. But I knew how to do it. My brothers and I knew how to do it, so any time my mother traveled, we would keep on brewing. So, the customers would keep coming and when they asked "where is your mother?" we would say, she has gone to the market, so nobody would even know that she has traveled out of town.

While these arrangements were not dictated by parental choice, but rather by family circumstances, this arrangement still shapes boys' empathy for women's experiences and attitudes toward women's chores in general. Today, in his own household, this respondent does not see chores as his wife's responsibility—he has always had domestic responsibilities in his home:

> Yes, so I've never seen it as anything. I still do it. I wake up early in the house, so I don't see why I should wake up early and wait until my wife gets up later to come and cook when I know how to cook. I am sometimes even better than her, so I don't see anything wrong with going to the kitchen and cooking.

Also, even though parents with only sons did not create deliberate equality between boys and girls, as there were no girls present in the household, equality was present, as all the boys were generally treated the same. This circumstance let parents who would have taught more gendered messages if there had been both boys and girls in the household, to be freer with their sons. As one respondent explains, his mother never said "you can't do this because this is for girls." However, the freedom she gave to her own children (all boys) was not received by the respondent's female cousins: It is possible that had his household included both boys and girls, gender differences would have been more apparent.

Discussion

This paper examines the family dynamics that contribute to the development of gender equitable attitudes among Ghanaian men. Specifically, through a mixed-methods approach that utilizes both the 2003 Ghana Demographic and Health Surveys (GDHS) and 33 in-depth interviews with gender equitable Ghanaian men, this study provides evidence that gender equitable Ghanaian men have family dynamics that create two types of responses—an awareness of women's power, and empathy for women's experiences—that contribute to men's gender equitable attitudes in later life. When men hold this awareness and empathy, they are more likely to connect with women and relate to their life experiences, as well as respect their capabilities. Therefore, these attitudes inevitably lead men to treat women with greater equality.

While family experiences and the gender attitudes of parents are central to the development and reinforcement of men and women's gender attitudes in adulthood (Booth and Amato 1994), family influences alone do not create adult gender attitudes.

None of these experiences are either fully necessary, or sufficient for creating gender equitable attitudes among men. Many respondents whose attitudes were highly impacted by family experiences explain that their male siblings, who witnessed the same family dynamics, adopted traditional gender attitudes in adulthood. Likewise, other respondents developed gender equitable attitudes without either of these experiences—a significant shaping experience in later life (such as a life threatening illness) lead some respondents to change their gender attitudes and traditional interactions with women, despite growing up in traditional families.

Therefore, what is the utility behind these findings? First, this paper is a small piece of a large research study, which seeks to understand why some men choose to hold gender equitable attitudes despite the prevailing male dominant context in Ghana through an exploration of multiple influences on men's gender attitudes, including family, schooling, religion, intimate relationships, and personality characteristics. Therefore, these in-depth interviews with gender equitable Ghanaian men provide evidence of numerous shaping experiences over the life course that can influence men's gender attitudes. The experiences in childhood that cultivate men's awareness of women's power and empathy for women's experiences contribute to men's attainment of a larger tipping point, whereby men choose to hold gender equitable attitudes, and reject the patriarchal dividend. Because male dominance is so pervasive in Ghana, the decision to be a different kind of man is quite a difficult one, and multiple influences are needed to bring about this change.

Ameliorating gender inequality is critical to improving the livelihoods of Ghanaian women. And, because men hold significant power in the government, the local

economy, and particularly in traditional households in Ghana, increased male participation in the reduction of gender inequality is essential to creating social change. However, the literature consistently undervalues the perspectives of men, and assumes that men never freely choose to relinquish their gendered authority. Yet these gender equitable Ghanaian men demonstrate that this assumption may not be true; there appear to be men who are freely and willingly ready to embrace a societal shift toward greater gender equity. It is the role of social scientists to understand the life experiences of these men, their motivations for holding equitable attitudes, and translate these findings into programs and policies that can cultivate gender equitable among more Ghanaian men.

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