

What is sexual empowerment? And how to measure it?

Ine Vanwesenbeeck

ICRH, Gent, December 4, 2014

Preview

- Wide application of the concept..
- What elements does it contain?
- What is difficult about it?
- What are ways forward?

'Western' feminism..

Sex Roles
DOI 10.1007/s11199-011-9995-3

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Adolescent Girls' Sexual Empowerment: Two Feminists Explore the Concept

Sharon Lamb · Zoë D. Peterson

Sex Roles
DOI 10.1007/s11199-011-0069-3

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Beyond "Empowerment"? Sexuality in a Sexist World

Nicola Gavey

Sex Roles (2012) 66:746–757
DOI 10.1007/s11199-012-0123-x

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Female Adolescents, Sexual Empowerment and Desire: A Missing Discourse of Gender Inequity

Deborah L. Tolman

'Southern' feminism..



Sexuality and Empowerment: An Intimate Connection

Kate Hawkins, Andrea Cornwall and Tessa Lewin

Pathways Policy Paper

October 2011



Empowerment: A journey not a destination



Development in general..

Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators

Ruth Alsop
Nina Heinsohn

World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510, February 2005



Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
Department of International Development
Queen Elizabeth House
University of Oxford

Agency and Empowerment: A review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence^s

Emma Samman[^] and Maria Emma Santos[^]

Prepared for the 2009 Human Development Report
in Latin America and the Caribbean

First Draft: May 18, 2009

Health and well-being promotion..



Sexuality education..

Sex Education
Vol. 8, No. 3, August 2008, 345–356



What does 'empowerment' mean in school-based sex and relationships education?

Grace Spencer*, Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton

Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education University of London, London, UK



**AFRICA REGIONAL SEXUALITY
RESOURCE CENTRE**

Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series 3

Empowering Youths Through Sexuality Education: The Challenges and Opportunities

PROF. BENE E. MADUNAGU
Chairperson, GPI Executive Board
Girls' Power Initiative (GPI)
Calabar, Cross River State,
Nigeria

*Lagos, Nigeria
March 24, 2005*

Elements of sexual empowerment

- Expansion of ability to make choices in sexuality
- Components: agency, competence, control..
- A process rather than an outcome
- Degrees:
 - *having* choice (resources, opportunities)=>structural/ideological
 - *using* choice (agency, power)=>individual/experiential
 - *achieving* choice (outcome)=>structural and individual
- Dimensions:
 - psychological, physical, social, economic, legal
- Degrees and dimensions indivisible

More elements..

- Individual & relational (proxy, collective) agency
- Requires at least (self-) awareness of (self-) interests
- And an enabling environment..
- Participation and people-centeredness crucial
- Goals, processes and outcomes may differ across individuals, contexts, times and places
- Outcomes may be messy, contradictory, unintended

Criticisms, doubts, problems...

- With so much variety, a useful concept at all?
- Is authentic choice possible at all?
- Sexual empowerment overly sexualised?
- Awareness may be burdening (for girls)
- What are boys' empowerment needs and concerns?
- Dictating goals by definition disempowering
- Educators' vs girls' / boys' sexual empowerment goals
- Sexual empowerment vs sexual health

More problems..

- In programming
 - No one-size-fits-all strategies
 - Heterogeneity of empowerment needs/concerns
 - Limited compatibility w health/outcome centered approach
- In research
 - Empowerment too complex to measure?
 - Lack of a universal(ly agreed) individual measure/indicator
 - Measuring at individual level alone insufficient
 - Deficiency of study designs

Ways forward

- Complex obligation!
- Transparency & precision: empowerment for what?
- In programming
 - Knowledge, skills, awareness, support, gender transformation
 - Connecting bottom-up and top-down goals
 - Multicomponent programming
- In research
 - Agree upon crucial indicators
 - Multidimensional and multi-method measuring
 - Studying how and when (which) sexual empowerment can have positive outcomes for whom



Thank you for your attention!