Research Article

Victim, Mother, or Untapped Resource? Discourse Analysis of the Construction of Women in ICT Policies

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Abstract

This article analyzes the construction of women in national ICT policies in South and Southeast Asia. The aim is to unravel the role ascribed to women in these policies and how this affects suggested measures. The research is based on critical discourse analysis and shows that women are mainly constructed as victims, mothers, or an untapped resource. We argue that if women are specifically targeted in policies, careful attention should be given to how they are portrayed. Our analysis also shows that in most cases the suggested solutions on how to include women in the ICT society only deal with the symptoms of gender inequality rather than the structures that prevent equal opportunities. We conclude by discussing implications for research and practice.

Introduction

Developing countries are making big investments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) to boost development. Whereas there have previously been discussions about whether ICTs can lead to social or economic developments (Avgerou & Walsham, 2001), the last decade's debate has changed from the question of whether ICTs should be used to how they should be used for development (Dé & Ratan, 2009; Harindranath & Sein, 2007; Walsham, Robey, & Sahay, 2007). The answer to the "how" question, that is, how ICTs should be implemented and by whom, is governed by various steering documents such as ICT policies. The United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stress how important ICT policies are for how ICTs are implemented (Biggs & Zambrano, 2013; Isaacs, 2011; OECD, 2012) and state that ICT policies "have become mainstream economic policies for underpinning growth and jobs, increasing productivity, enhancing delivery of public and private services, and achieving broader socioeconomic objectives" (OECD, 2012, p. 184). Policy documents are, however, not neutral and, according to Bacchi (1999, 2000, 2012), there is a need to analyze policy documents based on the proposed solutions. The idea is that "what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change)" (Bacchi, 2012, p. 21). By critically examining policies, we can highlight what the policy producers find problematic. The way these producers talk about the problems also determines what does and does not get done:

> The premise behind a policy-as-discourse approach is that it is inappropriate to see governments as responding to "problems" that exist "out there" in the community. Rather "problems" are "created" or "given shape" in the very policy proposals that are offered as "responses." (Bacchi, 2000, p. 48)

There is a worldwide consensus on how important women are for development. Gender equality is seen as a prerequisite for sustainable development and for a fair and sustainable world (Boserup, Tan, & Toulmin, 2013;

Tembon & Fort, 2008; UN Women, 2016). The United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs) target gender equality and empowerment of all women and stress the need to "[a]dopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels" (SDG 5 targets; UN, n.d.). The importance of women is also acknowledged in the World Summit on the Information Society's (WSIS) agenda for the information society (WSIS, 2005a), where participating nations affirmed their commitment to work for gender equality and women's empowerment (WSIS, 2005b). In the "WSIS+10 review" (WSIS, 2014), the importance of including women in the information society was reaffirmed. While a gender divide has been identified, ICT is seen as a tool for gender equality and women's empowerment. The WSIS agenda has played a major role in policy development and government actions, where national ICT policies often refer to WSIS as the source for the agendas put forward. However, despite policy statements (such as the MDG [Millennium Development Goals], SDG, and WSIS) and legal frameworks targeting women's empowerment in Africa and Asia, women are still less educated, earn less, own less, and have poorer health than men (Tvedten, 2010; UNDP, 2014). This exclusion of women from the benefits of development also extends to their exclusion from the information society. In a study based on nine developing countries in Africa and Asia, the World Wide Web Foundation found that women are "about 50% less likely to be connected than men in the same age group with similar levels of education and household income" (World Wide Web Foundation, 2015, p. 3).

Thus, there is an urgent need to include the gender aspect in the research we are conducting in ICT for development (ICT4D) (Andersson & Hatakka, 2013; Gillard, Howcroft, Mitev, & Richardson, 2008; Walsham et al., 2007). In a well-cited article where the future landscape of ICT4D was drafted (Walsham & Sahay, 2006), the issue of gender was not addressed (Gillard et al., 2008). A year later the same authors acknowledged this in a special issue on ICT4D (Walsham et al., 2007), where they concluded there was too little research that addressed the role of women in the field. When we conducted an extensive literature study several years later on empirical research in ICT4D (Andersson & Hatakka, 2013), we found that whereas there are many studies about acceptance or diffusion of technology that use gender as a variable, true engagement with gender theories or underlying structures of inequality is less common (Andersson & Hatakka, 2013). Notable exceptions include the study by Wheeler (2007) on women's IT practices in the Middle East and North Africa, Rhodes' (2009) actor-network theory analysis of African Women's Micro-Enterprise Development Organization, and Geldof's study (2011) in Ethiopia and Malawi on how gendering in daily life shapes the gendering of ICT use. Conquering gender inequality in and through ICT4D projects "requires nothing less than a commitment on the part of all stakeholders to become gender aware" (Buskens, 2015, p. 1).

For this study we analyzed ICT policies using critical discourse analysis, our unit of analysis being the construction of women in these ICT policies. The aim of this article is to unravel the role given to women in ICT policies and to investigate how this in turn affects the possibility of women's empowerment through ICT use. This is done through a critical discourse analysis of South and Southeast Asian national ICT policies. In this analysis we look at how women are described, what roles they are given, and what problems the policies aim to solve. Our research question is: How are women constructed in national-level ICT policy discourses in South and Southeast Asia?

Our study contributes to existing research on gender and ICT4D. The remainder of this article is structured as follows: The next section introduces related research on women, development, and technology. In the Material and Methods section, we present our research method and critical discourse analysis. The Results section comprises the results of our analysis. Finally, in the Discussion and Conclusion section we discuss the research findings and their implications for practice and research.

Related Research

ICT has often been discussed as a tool for overcoming differences between men and women (Kuriyan & Kitner, 2009), but "hard data about how this occurs are scant" (Wheeler, 2007, p. 89). Whereas there is a strong belief that ICT can increase women's social, economic, and political situations (Hafkin & Huyer, 2006), a gender divide is apparent in how fewer women than men access and use ICT (see, e.g., Biggs & Zambrano, 2013;

Hafkin & Huyer, 2007; Hilbert, 2011). In this way, ICT may deepen existing inequalities between women and men or create new imbalances (Sandys, 2005). We must be aware that the introduction of technologies is a double-edged sword in that technology also can be used by the rich and those in dominant positions to "retain their positions of economic, social and political power" (Unwin, 2009, p. 2). Related to this study we find that, worldwide, men dominate technical work: "Women's employment in the information technology, electronics and communications (ITEC) sector is much lower than their participation in the workforce generally, and it is declining in most industrialised countries" (Wajcman, 2009, p. 145).

It is, however, important to stress that the problem with women's structural exclusion from the information society is not due to a mere lack of access to technologies, implying that if women only get hold of technology, the inequalities will automatically flatten (Buskens, 2015). A study done in India (Patel & Parmentier, 2005) showed that women working in the IT industry had their positions set by traditional gender roles, in this case, placing them at the periphery of the employing organizations. Another study by Hilbert (2011) that analyzed 12 Latin American and 13 African countries from 2005–2008 revealed that women's lower level of ICT access and use correlated strongly with their disadvantaged situation with regard to education, work, and income.

To support gender equality with respect to ICT access and use, we need to accept that ICTs and gender relations within a community are continuously being shaped by each other (Sinha, 2009). As an example, a study about women working with ICTs in the United Arab Emirates found that these women did not mind Internet censorship policies that reflected patriarchal values because they felt this was a price they were willing to pay to avoid westernization (Vodanovich, Urquhart, & Shakir, 2010). Thus, they accepted patriarchal censorship in order to preserve their culture. In our own studies we have seen examples of cultural and religious traditions that limit the use of ICTs for women's own "protection." In a study in Kenya, for example, we saw that husbands prevented their wives from using the Internet because the men did not want the women to be exposed to "inappropriate" content (Hatakka, Ater, Obura, & Mibei, 2014). Providing women with access to ICTs and information is a prerequisite to closing the gender divide, and it has been argued that ICTs can be instruments for empowering women (Buskens, 2010). For this empowerment to occur, there is a need to involve many actors at the same time:

> Government agencies, civil society groups and private sector stakeholders will need to work together in all sectors to ensure that ICT initiatives are systematically integrated with wider efforts to expand women's choices and capabilities in the labour market, in the home, at school and in public life. Training policymakers across different sectors (such as health, education, small business, agriculture) to understand and harness the potential of ICTs to tackle poverty and gender inequality may be a good starting point. (World Wide Web Foundation, 2015, p. 7)

However, access to ICTs and information is of little value if women lack the skills and capacity to use them (Potnis, 2015). In addition, if deeply rooted social structures and norms limit women from using ICTs, the provision of technology and access to information will have little to no effect in creating a more gender-equal society.

In discussing women's exclusion from technologies, feminists have made an important point by drawing our attention to the fact that the problem is not rooted in women and their values, aspirations, and interests, but in broader structures of society and how gender has become embedded in technology itself (Van Zoonen, 1992; Wajcman, 2009). The societal structure with different role models and different levels of exposure to technology has constructed men as more technologically competent and savvy than women (Cockburn, 1983; Wajcman, 2009). Feminists have argued that there is no natural link between gender and technology (Harding, 1986) and that this alleged link between men and technology is just a historical construct. Early feminists pointed to men's monopoly of technology and how technology reproduced patriarchy; whereas, later feminists have focused more on the mutual shaping of technology and gender and in what ways the relationship between them is changeable (Wajcman, 2009). In this sense, technology is seen both as a source and a consequence of gender relations (Wajcman, 2004). If we accept this mutual shaping of technology, then there is a need to effect change in the dominant male characteristics of technology and to include women in the design of technology. Previous research (see, e.g., Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993; Suchman, 2008; Van Zoonen, 1992)

has shown that the scarcity of women in the technological community has affected the design, content, and use of technology that disfavors use by women.

Against this backdrop there is an obvious need to address gender concerns from many angles when it comes to policy making. However, gender concerns—from any angle—are largely absent from ICT policies: "Most ICT and e-governance policies do not openly tackle gender. On the contrary, there seems to be an assumption that ICTs, somehow or automatically, will promote gender equality, implicitly assuming that ICTs are gender-neutral" (Biggs & Zambrano, 2013, p. 28).

Material and Methods

Ours is a qualitative study wherein we use critical discourse analysis to analyze national ICT policies in South and Southeast Asia. The reason for choosing policies from South and Southeast Asia is that we have extensive experience of previous research in this region. In addition, the region is interesting since the ranking of the gender inequality index (a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men) varies greatly among the countries (see Table 1) (UNDP, 2015). This provides our study with a wider spectrum of women's measured equality level and helps us avoid the bias of only researching similar countries.

Data Collection

To uncover the ICT policies for each country in South and Southeast Asia, we searched Google and visited each government's website. In our Google search we combined these keywords: [country name], ICT, policy, strategy, program, digital agenda, master plan. In most cases we found the policies on the websites of the ministries of ICTs and telecommunications. We also emailed the ministries that housed the policies, asking them to confirm that we had the latest version of their policies. We chose to include those policies that the ministries said were their guiding ICT policies, whether they were called *policy, program,* or *strategic plan.* Of the 20 countries in South and Southeast Asia, for three of them (East Timor, Laos, Myanmar) we could find no ICT policy. For the remaining 17 countries, we identified 28 policy documents. Of these, only 11 policy documents from six countries contained specific sections that in one way or another included gender issues: Afghanistan (two), Bangladesh (two), Cambodia (two), Pakistan (two), Philippines (one), and Sri Lanka (two) (see Table 1).

Critical Discourse Analysis

We based this study on critical discourse analysis because it allowed us to analyze the language 'beyond the sentence' (e.g., grammar and phonetics, which is the case in classical linguistics), presented in the policies. Foucault (1970) talks about discourses as "verbal traces" left behind by individuals, social groups, or institutions. Discourse analysis is in this way, first of all, an analysis of oral expressions and written documents that a culture or an organization generates. Discourse analysis concerns the role of language in the construction of the social reality. *Discourses* can be defined as "sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positionings" (Parker, 1994, p. 245), and these constructions guide how we see the world. Our study builds on the premise that how we name the world and phenomena in it determines how we understand it, because discourses "make available ways of seeing and ways of being, [and therefore] they are strongly implicated in the exercise of power" (Smith, 2007, p. 172). We are interested in the political tension that lies in the connection between naming things and understanding things. In accordance with Foucault (1980), we are not interested in what is true or good when discussing power, but rather in unraveling those mechanisms where power, or power relations, creates *truths*—the instances where the truth comes into being. The advantage of using discourse analysis when analyzing ICT policies has been shown by, for example, Stahl (2008), who analyzed emancipation claims made in Egypt's ICT policy. He concluded that although the policy made claims for emancipation, many of the claims were not achieved since they were not the primary aims of the policy.

Data Analysis

In our analysis of the texts we have built on Foucault's notions of "verbal traces" and "subject positionings." Verbal traces refer to the oral or written expressions used to describe a certain phenomenon and subject positionings refer to the roles assigned to different actors. Foucault (1982) wrote about the objectification of human beings where they are made subjects in discourses, that is, they are assigned different roles with

Table 1. List of Policies Used in the Analysis.

Country	Gender Inequality Index*	ICT Policy Documents Studied/Year Written/Number of Pages
Afghanistan	152	+ Telecommunications and Internet policy documents; 2003; 108
		+ Telecommunications and Internet policy; 2003; 14
Bangladesh	111	+ National ICT policy; 2009; 60
		+ Digital Bangladesh for good governance; 2010; 13
Bhutan	97	− Bhutan information and communications technology policy and strategies (BIPS); 2004; 41
		− Bhutan telecommunications and broadband policy; 2013; 30
Brunei	n/a	− National digital strategy 2016–2020—national ICT white paper; 2015; 62
Cambodia	104	+ National ICT policy—2015—Policy proposal for the government of Cambodia; 2009; 15
		+ Information communication technology policy of Cambodia (draft); n.d.; 10
India	130	− Strategic plan 2011–2015; 2011; 18
		− National telecom policy—2012; 2012; 20
Indonesia	110	− 5-year action plan for the development and implementation of ICTs in Indonesia; 2001; 9
Malaysia	42	− National strategic ICT roadmap; 2011; 21
		− The Malaysian public sector ICT strategic plan—powering public sector digital transformation 2011–2015; 2011; 48
Maldives	49	− Maldives telecommunication policy 2006–2010; 2006; 24
Nepal	108	− Information technology policy 2057; 2000; 8
		− Technology and IT policy of Nepal; 2000; 2
Pakistan	121	+ IT policy and action plan; 2000; 42
		+ Telecommunications policy; 2014; 55
Philippines	89	+ The Philippine digital strategy transformation 2.0: digitally empowered nation; 2011; 154
		− Empowering a nation through ICT—Philippine strategic roadmap for the information & communications technology sector; 2006; 43
		− Philippine ICT); 2006;
Singapore	13	− Singapore national ICT masterplan—IN2015; 2015; 152
Sri Lanka	72	+ E-Sri Lanka: transforming a nation through information communication technology; n.d.; 4
		+ Policy and procedures for ICT usage in government (e-government policy); 2009; 35
Thailand	76	− Thailand information and communication technology policy framework (2011–2020); 2011; 30
		− The second Thailand information and communication technology (ICT) master plan (2009–2013); 2009; 114
Vietnam	60	− Decision no. 95/2002/qd-ttg of the Prime Minister on approving the master plan for information technology use and development in Vietnam by 2005; 2002; 9

* United Nations Human Development Report 2015—Work for Human Development (UNDP, 2015)
+ The policy addresses women;—The policy does not address women

different attributes. The role can be that of a parent, a child, a teacher, an expert, and so forth. The actor belongs psychologically and emotionally to a position and uses the images, metaphors, and concepts that are made relevant within that particular discursive practice (Davies & Harré, 1990). In particular, Foucault (1982) writes about *dividing practices,* where a subject is positioned in opposition to something else, for example, self–other, sick–healthy, insane–sane.

We have also used parts of Bacchi's WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be?) approach (Bacchi, 1999, 2000, 2012), which is intended for discourse analysis of policy documents. *WPR* starts with the "premise that what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change)" (Bacchi, 2012, p. 21). WPR examines how problems are represented and then subjects these problems to a critical analysis. By critically examining policies through WPR we can highlight what the policy producers find problematic and how the way they talk about the problem determines which solutions are suggested.

We analyzed our empirical data using two main steps. During the first step we identified patterns that formed the most prominent discourses; in the second step we analyzed the texts according to Bacchi's WPR approach (Bacchi, 2000, 2012).

First, we identified the subject positions (Foucault, 1982) assigned to women in the documents. We discussed the images, metaphors, and concepts we found and which dividing practices these positionings brought about. Second, we looked for verbal traces of the words used to describe women and their roles in relation to ICT implementations. For this part of the analysis we included questions from the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2000, 2012), which consisted of a set of questions that supports a critical inquiry into public policies. We started with the suggested solutions (e.g., more IT training for women) to untangle which problem these solutions represented (e.g., women are not skilled in IT). The questions that we brought into the analysis were (Bacchi, 2012):

- What is the problem described in a specific policy or policy proposal?

- What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the problem?

- What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

Limitations

For our data collection we included only policies written in English, although in browsing the government websites, we were unable to find any policies written in a national or local language. Another limitation was that we analyzed only how women were constructed in ICT policies; thus, we could only draw conclusions based on that type of policy. ICT policies do not stand alone and there may have been other policy documents in parallel with the ICT policies that counteracted or contradicted what was written in the ICT policies.

Results

In the verbal traces of the policies we analyzed, women were characterized in three ways: (1) as disadvantaged or marginalized, (2) as important because of their role in the family, and (3) as a potential resource for working with ICTs.

A common theme in most parts of the policies positioned women as something different, something else, separate from men and society. In one policy for Afghanistan, for instance, there is a need to stress that both men and women are supposed to use ICT:

> The progress that has been made in the country during the past year is extremely encouraging and shows the enthusiasm of the young generation *of both men and women* to build their knowledge and work to eradicate poverty, using ICT as means to access information to support these efforts. (Afghanistan Telecom and ICT Policy documents, 2003, p. 6, emphasis added)

In one of Pakistan's policies, women are singled out as a group that needs to be included. They are not included now, but they "can be hired and can become effective players in large numbers in all sectors of the software and telecommunications industry" (Pakistan IT Policy and Action Plan, 2000, p. 10).

We also found that men and women are supposed to be different when it comes to which ICT professions they are suited for. Here, a separation is made between jobs appropriate to men and jobs appropriate to women: "females are better suited for some ITS/ITES [information technology services/information technology–enabled services] jobs" (Bangladesh National ICT Policy, 2009, p. 34), or how gender comes with certain skills: "The government, together with the private sector and academe, shall develop a database which will include, amongst others, information on skills requirements of the industry and *skills available by*

gender" (The Philippine Digital Strategy Transformation 2.0: Digitally Empowered Nation, 2011, p. 66, emphasis added).

The quotation above implies that gender is a determinant for which skills a person has. One could argue that the mere act of documenting skills available by gender is not the same as saying that gender is a determinant for skills or that the database the policy makers refer to could have been initiated to ensure the effective targeting by gender in digital literacy programs. However, we believe that when this documentation of "skills available by gender" is done, the risk is that it reinforces the idea that one's gender determines one's skills.

The solution most often proposed in the policies on inclusion of women in the ICT job market is affirmative action. However, if women are better suited for some jobs, why is affirmative action needed? Rather than offering a solution to the problem of inequality in the ICT workforce, the way the problem is represented reaffirms women as somehow different and comprise a group that needs special treatment. Rather than addressing the reason for this inequality, the policy offers short-term solutions to the problem.

Apart from this dividing practice, we describe how women are portrayed as victims, mothers, or an untapped working resource.

The Victimized Woman

In several sections in the policy documents, we find women described as an "underprivileged" or "marginalized" group. Women are usually addressed as a group that needs extra care on the same terms as people who are disabled or who live in extreme poverty. For example: "Mainstream social advancement opportunities for disadvantaged groups as an immediate priority to minimize economic disparity and bridge the digital divide for (a) lower income groups, (b) ethnic minorities, (c) women, and (d) persons with disabilities and special needs" (Bangladesh National ICT Policy, 2009, p. 4).

Women are in this way portrayed in the context of ethnic minorities, people living in poverty, and persons with disabilities. Text-wise, women are literally positioned between ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. They are included in the victim discourse. When talking about women as a generalized group that requires special treatment or as a disadvantaged group, it reinforces the us-versus-them paradigm. The subject positioning is that of the "others"—women belong to a particular group that is not "us." Apart from the Bangladesh policy, similar examples are also found in Afghanistan's policy documents, where women are described as educationally underprivileged: "ICTs [are] particularly critical in countries where large segments of the population (including women) are educationally disadvantaged and live in rural areas, as is the case in Afghanistan" (Information and Communication Technologies [ICT] Policy, 2003, p. 10).

In this excerpt women are distinguished in relation to the population: "large segments of the population (including women)." Pointing to women in this way gives the impression that they are not always part of the population or community, but rather "something else." In one Philippine policy document where information security is discussed, we found that women and children are directly targeted as vulnerable to cybercrime:

> It is critical that modern laws and policies that are in place are appropriate and effective at dealing with the many potential consequences of cybercrimes. Typical areas of focus include: governance and security, international cooperation, emergency preparedness, information security exchange, human resources security, physical and environmental security, access information systems controls, incident handling and compliance. Specific considerations can be made for women and children in terms of cyber security since these are two vulnerable sectors for cyber crimes. (Philippine Digital Strategy Transformation 2.0: Digitally Empowered Nation, 2011, p. 46)

Why women and children are particularly vulnerable to cybercrime is not explained in the policy, but the text above implies that women and children are either less technically competent or more naive and easy to fool.

When analyzing the victim discourse from a WPR perspective, we found that the solution to women's exclusion from the information society was to minimize economic and technological differences between men and women. Hence, the problem is the lack of opportunities for women, but no solution to the problem is presented in the policies. Women are represented as victims and at a disadvantage and are seen as different from those who are advantaged, such as high-income groups, ethnic majorities, men, and people who are not disabled. The effect of this representation is that women are reduced to victims of injustices and inequalities.

Rather than seeing social structures, cultures, and societal norms as the problem, the focus is on the disadvantaged groups. If those who set the agenda only give women more opportunities via, for example, higher income and access to more technology, and believe this will make them more equal, there is a risk that the very structures that put women in this position in the first place are ignored. However, if, as Cockburn (1983) and Wajcman (2009) pointed out, role models and (for example) early exposure to technology have shaped the view that technology equates to manliness, then measures could be taken at this level.

The Motherly Woman

The second discourse concerns how women have a certain position in the family and community because they are women, mothers, or the ones who cater to the social aspects of the family and the community. In this second construction of women, they are seen as having an active role in the spread and use of ICTs. Instead of being seen as a marginalized and deprived group, they are here seen as important agents who push ICT use in their countries. However, the importance of women is only stressed as it pertains to their assigned roles as mothers or household caretakers. As early as 1992 Van Zoonen (1992) wrote about how policies for greater inclusion of women in science and engineering demonstrated that the reason women lag behind men was due to their specific position in society as mothers and the ones who care for the home. Women's first responsibility is to the family, and income-earning opportunities should be in combination with, and secondary to, their role as mother and caretaker. For example:

> The tools that technology offer in the areas of healthcare, social services, citizen's rights and overall development will directly or indirectly be made available to under-privileged groups in order to build up a strong and democratic society. In addition, *the role of women within families and communities* makes their active participation in the development and use of ICTs essential. Women's particular role in these areas makes their knowledge of and participation in ICTs critical. (Afghanistan Telecom and ICT Policy documents, 2003, p. 48, emphasis added)

Women are thus important in building an e-society because of their roles within families and communities. In an ICT policy from Bangladesh, we find that women are seen as potential entrepreneurs and that a need exists to promote women-led microenterprises, but with the proviso that they should not leave their localities: "Increase income earning opportunities for women without leaving their localities, enable them to form effective cooperatives to market their products and services, and create new job opportunities" (Bangladesh National ICT Policy, 2009, p. 10).

The implication of the above quotation is that women are not mobile, but must remain in their localities, whether this locality is the home or the village. The reason for this lack of mobility is not described, but it is most likely because of women's role in society generally or, more specifically, because of their role in the household as mother and caretaker. From our WPR analysis we find the problem is represented as women's lack of market access. If women were able to start microenterprises and market their products and services, they would become more equal. However, women's first obligation is to their household and family, and their access to the market should be limited to proximity to their homes. Thus, the solution to the problem of gender inequality is to create opportunities for women to enter the job market. Giving women access to income-earning opportunities could empower them, but the problem is the structures that prevent equal opportunities in the first place. In most societies a woman is at a disadvantage because she is assigned to caring for the family and the home, making her own career secondary. While it is undeniably beneficial for individuals to be able to earn an income, the problem of gender inequality should not be reduced to an issue of opportunities to enter the market. As can be seen from similar initiatives such as the microloans and village phone ladies in Bangladesh (Karim, 2011), the initiatives might have short-term benefits for a limited number of individuals, but it is questionable if they have helped to close the gender divide. A real solution to the problem would be to address the structures that create inequalities and to treat women and men as equals, with shared responsibility for children and home as well as equal opportunities to enter the job market. On a note similar to Fraser (1990, 2007a, 2007b), we believe that true emancipation can only exist if it is based on equal participation in all spheres of life. Fraser therefore argues that nurturing work (whether caring for children or aging parents) should be assigned to civil society and located outside of households (Fraser, 2013).

The Workingwoman in Becoming

The only exception to constructing women as either victims or mothers is found in a few instances where women are seen as a potential workforce. In Sri Lanka's ICT policy (E-Sri Lanka: Transforming a Nation through Information Communication Technology, n.d.) we found four pictures of women and young girls working with ICTs, and in Bangladesh's policy women are positioned as possible entrepreneurs by stating a need to "[e]stablish women's e-commerce centre to expand market access to promote women-led micro enterprises" (Bangladesh National ICT Policy 2009, p. 10).

In Pakistan's ICT policy, women were more explicitly portrayed as a potential resource for working with ICTs. This policy discusses how Pakistan needs to "[m]ake a special effort to train and induct women in the IT sector" (Pakistan IT Policy and Action Plan, 2000, p. 13). The policy notes that women are an "untapped human resource" and the need exists to

> [f]acilitate and encourage the training and hiring of women in the IT sector to help reduce unemployment and to utilise this largely *untapped human resource*. Women can be hired and can become effective players in large numbers in all sectors of the software and telecommunications industry. (Pakistan IT Policy and Action Plan, 2000, p. 10, emphasis added)

However, by using the literary figures of an untapped resource and writing about how women can (in the future) become "effective players" means that women currently are not effective players. Women are described as useful beings, but they are described in terms of what they may become.

Another description of women's exclusion from the ICT sector is found in Cambodia's ICT policy. Although it describes women as excluded, it stresses that this is a loss for the country. It further states that men and women are equal and, thus, should be treated equally in the workplace:

> In order to develop a pool of ICT experts for the national industry and related sectors, it is essential to involve within the process, the presence of women. Especially in the ICT field, women are still not being involved as they should. As stated and agreed at the "International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women," men and women are equal and therefore shall be equally treated in the work place. (National ICT policy, 2015, Policy proposal for the government of Cambodia, 2009, p. 14)

From our WPR analysis, the problem represented is women's exclusion from the workforce in the ICT industry. It is the companies' inability to hire women that creates this inequality and holds women back. The solution is most often affirmative action. Giving women access to the job market through affirmative action might have a short-term effect for the individuals who now are able to get a job, but the policy does not target the underlying reasons why the ICT industry is reluctant to hire women or address why the IT industry has such a deeply rooted masculine culture. A culture may hinder women from taking on a career in this field "because women are being asked to exchange major aspects of their gender identity for a masculine version, whilst there is no similar 'degendering' process prescribed for men" (Wajcman, 2009, p. 146). A more constructive, albeit more difficult, action to take could be to deal with the underlying structures that make companies more inclined to hire men than women.

An exception in this direction is found in one of the two ICT policies of the Philippines, where the gender perceptions of the ICT industry are mentioned as something that needs to be dealt with:

> The regional ICT councils shall also be involved to raise ICT awareness regarding ICTs' job growth opportunities. Local ICT or IT industry associations can also work towards strengthening the image of their respective sectors as viable career opportunities for young people. Differences in *gender perceptions of the ICT industry* may be determined to adopt more appropriate promotional activities for men and women. (The Philippine digital strategy transformation 2.0: digitally empowered nation, 2011, p. 81, emphasis added)

In the statement above, it is not the women who need to change, but the ICT industry.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our analysis has shown that women are constructed as victimized, motherly, or an untapped resource in ICT policies. On the other hand, when women are constructed as assets, they are viewed as such based on

maternal characteristics. Women are seen as important ambassadors, or promoters, of ICT to the children they care for and to the close community that constitutes the family and home. Women are thus seen to have a positive and important role to play, but the role is secondary to their positions of mother and wife.

Above all, women are constructed as something different, as "something else." This construction puts women in a position where they are alienated from the group, e.g., "the population," "men in general," that constitutes the norm, and affirmative actions are needed if women are to participate in the e-society. As Bacchi (1996, 2004, 2007) points out, affirmative action as the preferred "treatment" of the disadvantaged rather contributes to alienate the "targets" of the affirmative action. Positioning women as victims in need of help also means that women are seen as "inherently deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more" (Fraser, 1997, p. 25). While not underestimating the benefits of targeted interventions, there is a risk that policy makers believe they have solved the problem through these interventions, when the root cause has not been addressed.

To specifically target women in ICT policies is one way of making women "the other" or a special group possessing certain characteristics. This is not always beneficial for women who emotionally and psychologically inhabit the role (victim, mother, and so on) in their discursive practice (Davies & Harré, 1990). The risk is that these roles will be reinforced. We are not saying that the problematic situations—for example, women being less IT literate or spending more time at home—are created by the policy makers, but in pointing out these problems, the risk is that the situation is normalized. There is a risk that women are becoming what the policies construct them to be. If, for example, women read that they need to get jobs without leaving their localities, then this has become the truth. Or if policies pointing out that women are better suited for certain jobs, then this becomes a truth. It is in this way that discourses work: How we name phenomena in this world determines how we understand them and what we believe to be true (Smith, 2007).

A better way to name phenomena was found in Cambodia's ICT policy, which stressed that men and women are equal. A credible description of reality was made at the same time as a clear directive was set out: Men and women are equal and should therefore be treated equally. An alternate path is to not specifically mention women and instead use more neutral terms such as *gender.* An example from one of Cambodia's policies states, "Foster the use of ICT for formal and non-formal education, skills development and adult learning regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability or location" (Information Communication Technology Policy of Cambodia [draft], n.d., p. 6).

Having said this, women in South and Southeast Asia are often marginalized. Not mentioning them may lead to further marginalization or exclusion from the e-society. In several ICT policies women are not mentioned at all. It is unlikely that this reflects how men and women use ICTs equally or how women are not seen as "the others." The risk of not mentioning women is that the structures of gender injustice are glossed over; therefore, those structures remain invisible and powerful.

What is the best way for ICT policy makers to acknowledge that women are marginalized without reinforcing stereotyped images of them? Should women be specifically targeted in the policies or not? One thing our analysis showed is that if women are specifically targeted in policies, careful attention should be given to how women are portrayed in the policies—because language and words matter. Additionally, our analysis showed that the solutions provided (e.g., train women in IT, make it possible for women to work close to home) deal only with the symptoms of gender inequality.

We encourage policy makers to suggest solutions that deal with the structures that oppress women in the first place. The problem of gender inequality should not be reduced to an issue of training or of opportunities to enter the job market. To narrow or close the gender divide, the solution would be to change the structures that create inequities in the first place. It could of course be argued that structural changes are too grand to be addressed in ICT policies. However, if we believe that ICTs can contribute to positive changes, we must also believe that ICTs can and should contribute to more gender-equal societies. There are no quick fixes. For societal changes to occur we must strive for equality in all instances, including ICT policies. One way to strive for equality is to include women in the concrete practices of technology design and innovation. Technology is not neutral, and getting more women involved in its design is crucial for overcoming the gender divide:

> Drawing more women into design—the configuration of artefacts—is not only an equal employment opportunity issue, but is also crucially about how the world we live in is shaped, and for whom. We live in a technological culture, a society that is constituted by science and technology, and so the politics of technology [are] integral to the renegotiation of gender power relations. (Wajcman, 2004, p. 151)

Only in one policy did we see the suggestion to include women at the design stage. This was addressed in one of the policies from the Philippines, when discussing which were the key areas for e-government: "Incorporate gender and green ICT considerations in design of government ICT systems and infrastructure" (Philippine Digital Strategy Transformation 2.0: Digitally Empowered Nation, 2011, p. 23).

Implications for Practice and Research

This study has implications for practice by drawing attention to the importance of considering how policymakers name things when writing policies. Consideration should also be given to which solutions are offered and if these solutions will solve the problem or simply address the symptoms of the problem. For these considerations to be incorporated at the time a policy is drafted, expert help will probably be needed—from linguistic experts to analysts who can systematically model problem–solution relationships. In this study we have focused on ICT policies, but in guiding practice it is important to stress that the gender analysis also needs to be continued through the policy implementation phase—to ensure the policies will not simply offer lip service. Policy is a political process, and the question is: Does naming things differently promote "participatory parity"? (e.g., Fraser, 2007a, 2007b, 1990). Bearing these limitations in mind, we still want to draw attention to how policy shapes the way we perceive the world. What we have addressed in this article is how policies must change their focus to the underlying structures and political processes that prevent members of society—women, in this case—from participating on a par with men.

We propose that the following actions be taken when ICT policies are constructed and implemented:

- Before writing the policy, do a thorough problem analysis, including an analysis of what the policy can and cannot solve (e.g., are certain political measures needed to fulfill the requirements of the policy?).

- Follow recommendations and best practices on how to implement ICTs to empower women (see, e.g., Biggs & Zambrano, 2013; WSIS, 2014).

- When drafting the policy, consult experts on, for example, gender and linguistics.

- If women are to be targeted, use the term *gender* instead to include both sexes or, if not, stress that men and women are equal. For instance, there is a difference in stating that "gender considerations should be made when employing staff" and "women should be considered when employing staff."

- Ensure that gender analysis is continued throughout the policy implementation phase.

Whereas we are aware that adopting these recommendations may seem daunting, there are no real options if there is to be a true commitment to gender equality.

Finally, this study has shown the benefits of using critical discourse analysis and the WPR approach as tools when analyzing the underlying messages of policies. The WPR approach is useful since it makes us focus on the representation of problems and critically assess these problems. ∎

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