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CHANGING MEN TO CHANGE GENDER: COMBATting HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY THROUGH ANTIVIOLENCE ACTIVISM IN NORTHERN INDIA

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Studies of challenges to hegemonic masculinity often struggle with the question of how men change. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of Men's Action to Stop Violence Against Women (MASVAW), a men's antiviolence movement in Uttar Pradesh, India, we examine the context and consequences of changing gender regimes. Centering on relationships in our analysis of gender, we supplement nine in-depth interviews of MASVAW leaders with 18 additional interviews with a woman (usually their wife) and a male friend or colleague, obtaining a holistic picture of changes to men's personal gender ideology and practices. By examining challenges to hegemonic masculinity within a relational context, our analysis reveals how men's motivations, efforts and, ultimately, success to curb violence against women is shaped by their relationships. Families, wives, and other MASVAW members can both act as allies and challenges in any effort to dismantle hierarchical gender regimes and reimagine hegemonic masculinity.

INTRODUCTION

By theoretically elevating gender from the level of roles to an institution, scholars have illuminated the dynamic power gender has to shape social action and the ways it unequally organizes people ([Connell, 2009](#); [Lorber, 1994](#); [Martin, 2004](#); [Ridgeway, 2009](#); [Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999](#); [Risman, 2004](#)). An important benefit to this transition has been the emphasis on the relational dimension of gender. As Connell (2009:73)

notes, “When we look at a set of gender arrangements, whether the gender regime of an institution or the gender order of a whole society, we are basically looking at a set of *relationships* – ways that people, groups and organizations are connected and divided” (emphasis original). Since gender operates within a dichotomous binary that presupposes differences, it is impossible to escape gender because all of our interactions with people are at risk of being interpreted and judged by cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity (Lorber, 2005; Lucal, 1999; West and Zimmerman, 1987). In reconceptualizing gender as an institution, however, scholars have continued to struggle with the notion of change. While many contend this theoretical shift can help make gender more visible and thus susceptible to intentional change (Lorber, 1994; Martin, 2004), how the change will occur or what it will look like is often more vague.

Central to the social constructionist approach to gender is the realization that “gender has changed in the past and will change in the future” (Lorber, 1994: 6). But the question for many feminists and activists has been how to move forward by intentionally shaping this change in the direction of greater equality between men and women. Recently, in an effort to combat the deterministic tendency to view all men and women’s actions as “doing” gender, feminists have called for scholars to pay more attention to the processes of “undoing gender” (Deutsch, 2007; Lorber, 2005; Risman, 2009). Deutsch (2007), in particular, argues we distinguish between using the term “doing” gender to refer to social interactions that reproduce gender differences and “undoing” gender to highlight those actions that reduce gender difference. She contends that to take seriously the social constructionist perspective would also entail an examination of resistance and subversive actions.

In combining Deutsch’s (2007) call to examine instances where people strive to “undo” gender with Connell’s (2009) insight into the relational dimension of gender, we offer an analysis of the context and consequences of changing gender regimes. Drawing on a study of men’s antiviolence activism in Uttar Pradesh, India, we examine how the activists’ efforts to challenge hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) were both motivated and hindered by key relationships the men were embedded within. By supplementing the interviews of nine leaders of Men’s Action to Stop Violence Against Women (MASVAW) with 18 additional interviews with women and men close to the activist, we are able to obtain a more holistic picture of changes to personal gender ideology and practices that emerge from and shape interactions within a local setting.

HOW DOES HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY CHANGE?

The concept of hegemonic masculinity rests on the idea that there are multiple masculinities which are hierarchically positioned in society and in relation to each other (Connell, 2005, 2009; Kimmel, 1994; Messner, 2000). According to Connell (2005: 76)

‘Hegemonic masculinity’ is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable.

Importantly, the number of men that can actually succeed at doing or embodying this type of idealized masculinity may be quite small. However, Connell notes that the majority of men can benefit from its hegemonic status through complicity. While occasionally discussed as something someone possesses, hegemonic masculinity is better understood “as a configuration of practice” and “simultaneously positioned in a number of structures of relationships” (Connell, 2005:73).

Connell’s concept of “hegemonic masculinity” has revolutionized the studies of men and masculinities, but it is not without critique (Beasley, 2008; Demetriou, 2001; Duncanson, 2015). Since the first publication of *Masculinities* in 1995, the application and subsequent criticisms of this key concept have been frequent and varied. For instance, Beasley (2008) contends that too much slippage exists within the term, as it is sometimes unclear whether it refers to those in a position of cultural leadership that can ensure popular consent or if it references the most dominant and widespread version of manhood. In addition to more theoretical concerns, some have critiqued its empirical utility by noting its more static application (Duncanson, 2015). Following Duncanson (2015), however, we believe that the concept continues to have usefulness but that scholars must better theorize how hegemonic masculinity may change.

In revisiting the concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:853) note “the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity should explicitly acknowledge the possibility of democratizing gender relations, of abolishing power differentials, not just of reproducing hierarchy.” But, as Duncanson (2015:240) asks, “how is this dismantling to come about?” Furthermore, what will the evidence look like and how will we recognize it? With challenges to masculinity coming from many directions, scholars have noted the development of what they call “hybrid masculinities” (Demetriou, 2001; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). Calling

attention to the relational dimension within masculinity itself, “hybrid masculinity” describes “the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men’s gender performances and identities” (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014:246). While recognizing this as an example of gendered practices changing, scholars have tended not to view this as evidence of the dismantling of gender regimes themselves. Bridges and Pascoe (2014) echo earlier criticisms by Messner (1993) and Dementriou (2001) that these practices represent only a change in the style but not the substance of masculinity. Rather than undermine hegemonic masculinity itself, these new forms of masculinity represent a reorganization of it because men of privilege adopt new practices as acceptable without challenging the basis of their cultural position or power. This begs the question: What do changes to hegemonic masculinity then look like? In what follows, we analyze the relational context and consequences for men that challenge the view that violence is a masculine privilege.

LOCALLY CHALLENGING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY: INTRODUCTION TO MEN’S ACTION TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (MASVAW)

Men’s Action to Stop Violence Against Women, or MASVAW, is a political movement that grew out of a 2001 campaign initiated by women’s groups in Uttar Pradesh to raise the visibility of domestic violence in the state (Hinsa Sahana Band Abhiyaan, or Stop Tolerating Violence Campaign). In the wake of the campaign, which had over 3,500 participants, most of them women, male attendees reflected that they needed to expand beyond mobilizing with women and reach out to men as the primary perpetrators of abuse (Das and Singh, 2014). Initiated in 2002, the MASVAW movement has subsequently spread to over forty districts in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal in India (MASVAW, 2012) and continues to have a close relationship with the international women’s movement (Shahrokh et al., 2015). Today, MASVAW is part of the larger MenEngage Global Alliance of NGOs and UN agencies that seek to engage boys and men to achieve gender equality (Center for Health and Social Justice, 2015).

MASVAW attempts to change social norms around gender inequality and violence against women (VAW) through a wide range of activities. These include interventions in schools, colleges and universities, on the

streets, in tea-shops and in all places where there are men. The “Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Violence” between November 25th and December 10th has been a crucial period for launching large-scale awareness campaigns and rallies.¹ Celebrating the International Women’s Day and collaborating with women’s organizations across the state has been another strategy. Employing innovative approaches with young men and boys in educational institutions, they encourage youth to debate, paint, discuss films and engage with other youth and men towards the goal of building a deeper understanding of the issues of VAW and gender inequality. They also mobilize media actors, encouraging them to help shape public opinion by making demands for gender justice in their reports of crimes against women. Members of MASVAW respond to incidents of violence against women by verbally warning the offenders and organizing local neighborhood watch groups. They also facilitate the filing of First Information Reports (FIRs) at police stations, and in collaboration with women’s groups, participate in conducting fact finding studies of reported incidents of VAW. In one university, MASVAW members have been responsible for the constitution of a university-wide Sexual Harassment Committee. MASVAW volunteers have also collaborated with women’s organizations for ensuring relief and rehabilitation for survivors of violence (Das et al., 2012; Mogford and Das, 2007; Roy and Das, 2014).

An important aspect of MASVAW is the sharing among men that helps them support each other through the process of change. MASVAW provides men an opportunity to discuss doubts and dilemmas about masculinity within a peer group. According to MASVAW Convener Satish Singh, “Although initially MASVAW was started to stop VAW... it moved towards strengthening the emotional aspect of men, sensitizing them towards women’s feelings, making them responsible in sexual relationships, and replacing their overbearing masculinity with an alternate concept of ‘being man’” (MASVAW, 2012:8). As an informal network, MASVAW is flexible and local groups determine their activities, meeting times, and participation in broader events (MASVAW, 2012).

DATA AND METHODS

The present paper emerges from a broader qualitative study about men’s experiences working with MASVAW (Mogford and Das, 2007). Recognizing that challenging hegemonic masculinity through being a “MASVAW man” is not always an easy process, the study attempted to

understand why men make such efforts. Through a series of in-depth interviews, the study sought to answer a number of questions: What kind of man is interested in the MASVAW movement, and why? Has participation in MASVAW changed them in any way? What have been some of the consequences, both positive and negative, of their shifts in their perspective on gender and participation in MASVAW?

Focusing on the experiences of nine highly active MASVAW men from the early years of the movement, two of the current authors conducted 27 in-depth interviews in 2005. In addition to interviewing each man individually, we supplemented their accounts by interviewing one close woman (usually their wife) and one close man (a friend or colleague) in their lives. By interviewing two people with firsthand experience of each man's life, our data allows us to speak more confidently on changes resulting from participation in MASVAW and the interactional consequences in their relationships. We intentionally recruited our sample of nine men because, as exemplars of MASVAW volunteers, we hoped they could provide insight into why men might participate in collective efforts to dismantle hegemonic masculinity. Rather than try to cross-check the narratives provided by the men, we used the same interview instrument in the supplemental interviews to gain an understanding of how MASVAW involvement shaped the participating men from the perspective of others in their lives. A local research associate conducted the interviews in Hindi as one of the authors guided the process by training the research associate in interview techniques, including how to probe for rich detail (Weiss, 1994). Our intent in probing was to understand the impacts, both internally and relationally, for men as they began to alter their conceptions and behaviors about masculinity. For example, if a man said that he now helps his wife in the kitchen (in this region, men traditionally do not enter the kitchen, as it is considered a woman's domain), the research associate would probe him to describe a specific and recent example to ascertain what happened, how he felt about it, and how others reacted. We also probed to learn how often men engaged in behaviors that sought to "undo" gender or appeared that way to those in their lives. Probing led to rich stories of the process of change and helped us understand the challenges and rewards in change for the man, his wife, and others in his family and community. Afterwards each interview was transcribed and translated into English.

To ensure a range of experiences and backgrounds, we recruited men from three locations across central and eastern Uttar Pradesh. The

resulting sample of nine men ranged in ages of 25 to 55 with most of them married (7 out of 9) and living in extended or joint family systems (7 out of 9). The men's professions varied widely from university teachers to a director of a local NGO to a small businessman and a farmer. Most of the women we interviewed (7 out of 9) were the men's wives. For the two unmarried men, we interviewed one's mother and another's sister. All of the women lived with the MASVAW man, giving them direct experience with his gendered behaviors. The supplemental interviews with men included work colleagues and close friends of the MASVAW men, whom we learned of from the man and subsequently recruited. We insured they had known the MASVAW man for several years and had regular and close contact with him, so that they could speak to any changes.

To analyze the context and consequences of when men challenge hegemonic masculinity and "undo" gender, we used a combination of inductive and deductive coding. In reviewing the transcripts, the first author initially looked for emergent themes in the causes and consequences of men's change as a result of their involvement in MASVAW (Weiss, 1994). After organizing the data according to these emergent themes and conducting extensive memos, the first and second author deductively analyzed the data to examine it from the perspective of challenging gender regimes. Drawing on Connell's (2009) insight into the relational dimension of gender, we concentrated on understanding how changes in the men had interactional and interpersonal consequences. Before turning to these findings, we provide contextual information about the expectations of masculinity and use of violence in Uttar Pradesh, India.

MASCULINITY, VIOLENCE AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN UTTAR PRADESH: SETTING OF THE STUDY

The current study occurred in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), where MASVAW started its journey and has been most active. Predominantly rural and poor, UP is India's most populous state, with 199.6 million people (Census of India, 2011). Kinship patterns of patrilocal residence contribute to women's lower status in northern India, where female literacy is 50 percent (Registrar General of India, 2011), and 33 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2005; Sanyal, 2009). Marriages are exogamous, and women often leave their home village to live in their spouse's extended family household,

which may put them at higher risk of abuse and leave them with little recourse to seek protection if violence does occur (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2005).

With a lifetime prevalence of 41.4 percent, according to the most recent National Family Health Survey, UP is ranked second among Indian states (after Andhra Pradesh) for violence against women, and includes many forms of extreme physical violence (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 2006; Kishor and Gupta, 2009; Shahrokh *et al.*, 2015). The National Crime Records Bureau reports that 23,254 crimes against women were registered in 2009 in UP, including 2,232 dowry murders, 1,759 rapes, and 8,566 cases of cruelty by husband or relative. The majority of crimes against women are committed by family members (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 2006). Strong cultural norms, including rigid beliefs about the subordinate place of women in relation to men and socio-economic barriers to women's autonomy, all contribute to maintaining a system of hegemonic masculinity predicated on men's right to violence.

Despite evidence of the strength of the hierarchical and violent gender structure, UP has been gradually progressing towards greater gender equality (Das *et al.*, 2012; Mogford, 2011; Mogford and Lyons, 2014). For example, UP has a tradition of women poets and scholars, and has seen two women chief ministers and a women governor in the post-independence era. The state government has signed on to progressive gender legislation, including the Women's Policy (2006) which focuses on increasing women's empowerment and ensuring their political participation. Also, many national and international nongovernmental organizations work in the area to promote women's rights (Kalpagam, 2000; Sen, 2000). Even with these positive institutional changes, systemic gendered violence and inequality remain entrenched. For example, less than three percent of women in UP own property, in spite of laws enacted in 2008 that allow for female inheritance (Shahrokh *et al.*, 2015). Social norms of *purdah*, or seclusion, keep women marginalized, and there are signs of anti-feminist men's rights organizations appearing as a backlash against increased women's empowerment (Shahrokh *et al.*, 2015).

Together, along with the work of MASVAW, men's taken-for-granted superior status and right to violence has been challenged, resulting in both improvements and backlash. Working to bring about positive change on a grassroots level, MASVAW educates people by offering a broader conception of what it means to be a man, uncovering the mechanisms of hegemony. In particular, they highlight that even men who do not

physically or verbally abuse women are complicit in maintaining this hegemony (Connell, 2005) if they are not actively working to dismantle the patriarchal gender system and "redefine their masculinity and their concepts about gender relations and the use of power" (Roy and Das, 2014: 32).

RELATIONAL CONTEXT AND CONSEQUENCES TO GENDER CHANGES

Centering on relationships in our analysis of gender as an institution (Connell, 2009) offers a useful theoretical lens from which to examine issues of change and stasis. For studies of men in particular, a relational analysis is important because "the production and reproduction of masculinity frequently involves the need to differentiate self from other" (Elliot, 2010: 453). Most often with studies of hegemonic masculinity, scholars highlight how it is positioned in relation to other forms of subordinated masculinity (Connell, 2005; Elliot 2010; Kimmel, 1994). In our study of an antiviolence movement that seeks to challenge, dismantle and reimagine hegemonic masculinity, men's relationships to women and their families significantly emerged as providing a motivation for change. In what follows, we analyze how the *context* of men's relationships with women served as an impetus for joining MASVAW and engaging in its work but also how this resulted in *consequences* within their kinship networks that acted at times as a barrier to change.

Relationships as a Context for Change: Motivations and Accountability

Given that MASVAW is a volunteer organization, a selection effect impacts which men join their efforts to challenge men's violence. Since we sampled nine highly engaged men in the movement, it may not be surprising that many of them had had experience with social justice and had been exposed to critical lessons about women's inferior social position prior to joining MASVAW. In exploring the accounts narrated by men, their colleagues, and their wives, we found a pattern among five of the nine men in which their relationships with women in their families – their wives, daughters, and/or sisters – shaped their gender consciousness prior to their involvement with MASVAW.² Wives, in particular, occupied an important role in this process by providing motivation for social action and holding the men accountable to their newly proclaimed modes of masculinity. In exploring details of the interactions between

men and their wives, we consider how the “day-to-day social interaction also has an influence on the development of gender consciousness” (Sullivan, 2004: 209).

In the stories of Rahul and his wife Pinki, we see how the seeds for larger changes to gender regimes can be sowed in the tension and contradiction of everyday life.³ According to Pinki,

Earlier it [anger] happened only once when we had just gotten married. We were talking about something at night while we were in bed and he slapped me. I also got angry and so I slapped him back. I told him ‘Don’t think that I’m like other wives whose husbands keep on hitting them and they don’t say anything. If you slap me once, I’ll hit you at least four times.’ In the morning when I got up, I told everybody that Rahul had hit me during the night.

Using a combination of her own threats of physical retaliation and public shaming for Rahul’s behavior, Pinki, early in their marriage, established a new set of interactional parameters for a husband. For his own part, Rahul recalls a different memory from early on in their marriage during which Pinki also stood up for herself by challenging his view about what it meant to be a man and husband:

One time I was out of town for four or five days and when I came back everything was changed. I was very angry and said, ‘What is this? You shouldn’t have done this!’ She replied, ‘What’s the harm in what I’ve done?’ And I said, ‘No, this is totally wrong. You will not touch anything in the future.’ Then she told me, ‘If I can’t touch any of your things, then you can live alone in your room – I won’t live here.’ Then I realized that I had been a bit harsh. She told me ‘For you I left my parent’s house and now I’m living with you, so if I’ve shifted something in your room, it’s not such a big deal.’ I thought that what she was saying was right.

Reflecting on their early marriage, Rahul and his wife Pinki offer two different memories of interactions in which the gendered norms of marriage conflicted. As Irby (2014:1270) notes, “The process of getting and being married involves men and women *becoming* ‘husbands’ and ‘wives,’ a process that men and women regularly engage in as they strive to enact the gendered expectations associated with marriage” (emphasis original). In the case of Rahul and Pinki, the uncertainty involved in getting married and learning to *become* a husband and wife provided Pinki the interactional space to challenge Rahul’s embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, especially the accepted use of violence. Under threat of her leaving, Rahul’s relationship with Pinki figuratively positioned him

to be open to the insights and work of MASVAW. In Rahul’s own words, “Even if I was not associated with MASVAW I would have worked on this front, but not with the same intensity...many myths would not have been broken down.”

While wives consistently emerged as an important relationship that motivated change, other women in the men’s domestic lives appear to have played an important, if indirect, role in making them receptive to MASVAW teachings. Of the five men with children in our sample, three of them had solely or mostly daughters. Given the strong preference for sons in Uttar Pradesh and the perception that daughters can be a burden for the family due to the expectation of costly dowries (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Panda and Astone, 2007), one might expect these men would view their daughters as a burden. However, the men often reported treating their daughters “as sons,” behavior that was corroborated by their wives and colleagues. For example, when the interviewer asked one of the male colleagues if the MASVAW man he was being interviewed about was satisfied having four daughters, he described the MASVAW man’s respect for his daughters:

He hasn’t ever expressed any sadness. Whenever I see him, he considers his daughters his sons, to the extent that his mother-in-law gets irritated that he is always with his daughters...He gives them the same love and affection that other people give their sons.

Finally, in one of our interviews, Prem, an unmarried man, directly attributes his pre-MASVAW gender sensitivity to the influence of his sisters. As he explains, growing up surrounded by sisters made him more empathetic to the needs of women.

I was always more sensitive than other boys towards women because I grew up surrounded by girls, in a joint family...If I found that something was wrong, then I denounced it, like passing comments or discussing girls, or teasing, etc. I did not do these things.

Our data suggest that, as was the case with wives, the contextual presence of daughters and sisters predisposed MASVAW men to see the impact of hegemonic masculinity on women. Already inclined to question the ways in which women were traditionally subordinated to men, the men were joining MASVAW in part to continue their journey in treating women better.

While their personal histories and relationships with women in their lives prepared men for the work of MASVAW, it was the relationships

with other men in the movement that led to the greatest transformation in how they understood and performed masculinity. Through participation in MASVAW, the men were exposed to activities designed to create awareness of gender inequities, reduce incidents of violence against women, work for institutional and personal change in gender relations, and ultimately redefine masculinity (Das *et al.*, 2012; Das and Singh, 2014; MASVAW, 2012; Mogford and Das, 2007). Importantly, the men in our study reported gaining new definitions of violence that recognized their own culpability and understood that to successfully enact social change first requires a personal transformation. Our interviews were replete with examples of men's recognition of their participation in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity through simple daily actions, such as the following:

I wasn't doing anything before joining MASVAW. When I woke up, she would fold the bedsheets. When I brushed my teeth, she would bring water. I thought, "This is my right. Without money I got a servant. My father purchased this servant for me." I ordered "Do this, do that," but after joining MASVAW, I realized actually I'm doing a very wrong thing.

In particular, the men recalled looking to the other members of the movement as examples for how to live, as well as talk about issues of gendered violence. As Deepu explained,

A group is helping me to change. If so many people are changing, so why should I stay behind? So many people are with me. These people are different from the normal league. I have the examples of these people. If something comes across, we can put examples of these people and say that there, there, there, there. You always need examples and we have several of them.

Through the examples of other men performing masculinity in a different way, the men felt empowered to and capable of making similar changes in their own lives. Our respondents told us that MASVAW gave them a platform to discuss their personal and social issues. Many men emphasized how invaluable it was that they found a community of like-minded people with whom they could share their problems.

For example, if I'm bothered by something – people are expecting something from me or laughing at me – then I can share this with other members of MASVAW... They hear me and aren't surprised... They pat me on the back and say "Don't worry, all of this happens."

Reminded that the men are not alone in questioning hegemonic masculinity, MASVAW provided men a peer group that held them to a revised and reconceptualized understanding of masculinity. They also gained energy to fight against negative reactions from the knowledge that other members have experienced similar hardships and to carry on. MASVAW relationships provided the men with inspiration and motivation. In reflecting on what MASVAW had done to men around him, another interviewee noted, "Earlier it was as if we were like sticks, but now we have started bending."

In MASVAW we see evidence for Duncanson's (2015) observation that the successful dismantling of gender regimes requires changing how one relationally understands themselves positioned to other people.

For the unraveling of hegemonic masculinity, men must be encouraged not so much to *change their ways* as to *change the way in which they negotiate their identities in relation to others*. Rather than forge their identities through relations of opposition or domination, men and subjects in general need to construct their identities through recognition of similarity, respect, interdependence, empathy, and equality with others (233, emphasis original).

Evidence for this process of "bending" which helped men to forge new relational identities can be seen in the changes men reported with the women in their lives. Participation in MASVAW helped men become more focused on interconnection and similarities with women. In particular, men's interactions with their wives revealed myriad instances of how, in striving to change dominant approaches to masculinity, men's personal relationships became more rewarding for both partners, shifting from hierarchies and power to friendship and greater equality.

In one MASVAW training activity, men are asked to close their eyes and visualize an average day in a woman's life, starting at five a.m. when she gets up to make chai, and continuing throughout the day as she conducts her various house-bound duties. Several of our respondents referenced this exercise as a catalyst to questioning traditional gender boundaries and viewing their wives as another *person*. This and other MASVAW experiences led to increased empathy and changed attitudes and behaviors in the men, as evidenced in the following quote:

And in terms of helping my wife, I try to be sensitive and I've improved my behavior towards her. I like to sleep late, but I understand that if I like it, my wife likes it too. So I don't want to disturb her, because I get up earlier than her. Every day the electricity goes off at 9:00 a.m. so I

have to do some things. If there's dishes left from dinner for washing, I wash them and I make the meal for my child and I make tea for myself. I think my sensitivity increased so I'm helping my wife. Otherwise earlier, I never helped.

The respondent makes the mental leap from envisioning his own pleasure to envisioning his wife's- if he enjoys sleeping in then she must enjoy it as well. Thus, he is able to put himself in her place, not only when she is doing something difficult (such as labor) but also when she is doing something enjoyable (such as sleeping late).

Another change we observed within relationships was men's willingness to take on domestic work. Examples provided by the MASVAW men, their male colleagues, and their wives suggested a transformation in attitudes and behaviors towards men's role in household labor and childcare. In one case, a male colleague recounted that the MASVAW man had begun doing so much child care that "it looks as if [he] gave birth to his daughters." The same man's wife also described his increased help:

Earlier I used to teach at a formal educational center, and even if I reached home at eight in the night I'd have to cook, look after the animals, etc. ... But now if I am cooking, say I'm making rice, he will cut up the vegetables. He will also help in washing the clothes, like the clothes of the children. ... He used to do no work once he was home. His only concern was getting chai on time and receiving the food on time. If he didn't get it on time, then he would make noise about it.

Another wife specifically mentioned that her husband's increased participation emanated from a new gender ideology he embodied. She reported that in the past her husband would occasionally assist in household labor as a favor to her, but it was done from the ideological standpoint that "women are made for working at home." She went on to say that he no longer divided tasks into "men's" and "women's" work. As evidence of the ideological shift, she emphasized that he is no longer embarrassed to help her in front of visitors, whereas before he had to hide his occasional instances of assistance.

MASVAW men's identity renegotiation also involved how genders differentially occupy physical space- where men and women co-exist and where women are and are not permitted to go. By increasingly sharing space with their wives, men changed how they relationally embodied physical spaces, reframing the location of gender, such as by being together in the kitchen or eating together, both of which deviate from traditional

gender scripts (Desai, 2010). In one poignant example, a respondent described how he had begun to share meals with his wife:

Earlier my wife stayed at a distance from me, according to tradition. Now we talk to each other about anything. We eat off the same plate... she could never do that earlier; first she used to serve me and then go eat, but now we eat together off the same plate.

The changes in gendered spaces extended beyond their own interactions and included allowing women greater autonomy by impacting where women travel and whom they interact with in public. Many women in Uttar Pradesh area practice *purdah*, or seclusion, and are only permitted to leave the home in specific circumstances (Mogford, 2011; Papanek, 1973). In the following example, a MASVAW man who lived in a rural village where *purdah* is practiced described an evolution in his attitude:

Earlier I had this feeling that if [my wife] went out of the house, I would lose face in the community. Now I know that her going out gives me prestige.

In her interview, his wife also described an increased freedom of mobility:

For example, today he has left me alone to sit and talk with you [a male interviewer]. This was not there earlier. I have the freedom to go wherever I want to go. I can freely talk to anybody.

When we asked men what they learned from MASVAW, they unanimously responded that they had come to the realization that violence against women refers to much more than physical abuse. According to one respondent:

I used to think that things like beating up your wife or rape constitute violence but now I think that doing something without a wife's permission or consent is [also] a kind of violence. If a woman wants to say something and a man stops her from expressing herself, even that will count as violence.

This realization facilitated relational changes between men and their wives. One of the most personal and powerful attempts to challenge hegemonic masculinity by "undoing" gender was in men's recognition of the practice of non-consensual sex. Prior to their membership in the MASVAW movement, they had not considered forced sex within marriage to be a violent act, but their perspectives reversed through participation in MASVAW. Out of all the married men we interviewed, over half of them openly disclosed that they had changed their behavior related to

forced intercourse (our interview guideline makes no reference to sex; the men brought it up on their own):

You have said that earlier unconsciously you have done violence, can you give me an example of that?

Earlier I sometimes used to have intercourse with force. Now I'm very conscious to have it only with her consent....The most significant thing [I've learned from MASVAW] was that coercive sex is a form of violence.

Another MASVAW respondent explained:

Earlier I did what I wanted. But now I do according to her wishes too, and I do this in my physical relationship also. Now I take her permission and if she says yes then I do. Earlier I never thought about it. If I needed, then I did and I never thought about whether she needed. But now I realize that we can do whenever both want.

The wife of this man corroborated this by noting "If there's any decision usually I take it, regarding sex also. Earlier it was not like this."

Despite often being prefiguratively sensitive to issues of gender inequality, participation in MASVAW enabled men to see existing gender regimes as unequal and to recognize their own complicity in the violence of hegemonic masculinity. Subsequently, men learned new ways to "do" gender that worked to "undo" culturally dominant understandings of hegemonic masculinity. The most significant of these changes occurred within their marriages: providing women greater physical autonomy; increasing participation in domestic activities traditionally associated with women and changing how they performed their status as husband, including a cessation of nonconsensual sex. All of the men and their wives reported having more satisfying marriages as a consequence of the changes the men had made.

Consequences of Change for Other Relationships: Barriers to Transformation

Any change, however, does not occur in isolation but has broader impacts on the relationships one is embedded within. Seven out of the nine MASVAW respondents in our study lived in cross-generational, extended family homes with their parents, their married brothers and their brothers' wives and families. In the context of an extended family household, patriarchy is the normative framework for multiple couples and their children under the same roof, wherein the paternal father holds power as the head patriarch. When a MASVAW man living in an extended

family challenges hegemonic masculinity, he is by necessity confronting the lifestyles that his co-family members consciously or unconsciously adhere to. Among the men we interviewed, this sometimes created tension and hostility in family relationships. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 852) suggest this is to be anticipated:

Hegemonic masculinities are likely to involve specific patterns of internal division and emotional conflict, precisely because of their association with gendered power. Relationships with fathers are one likely focus of tension... Ambivalence toward projects of change on the part of women are likely to be another, leading to oscillating acceptance and rejection of gender equality by the same men.

In our data, we found evidence of both tensions and ambivalence in how sons chose to construct relationships in a manner that challenged the traditional basis and legacy of gendered power.

Samer, for example, recounted his father's angry and dismayed reaction at how he and his wife chose to live. After his father observed him washing their child's *kathli* (quilted sheet), his father became angry and verbally abusive. Samer also recounted how his mother would become upset at how he let his wife come and go without permission. From the perspective of Samer's parents, he had become his wife's slave. While Samer may have changed his own understanding of violence and its place in the home, he did not have full control over the household and his father could still enact verbal abuse and threaten physical abuse.

The story of Abdes and his wife Sangeeta provides several examples of tensions that can result from challenging hegemonic masculinity. While Abdes and his wife had excellent communication and a remarkably equitable relationship, they lived in a joint family with Abdes's parents and brother's family. Earlier his parents objected to Sangeeta because she refused to adhere to certain traditions: she did not wear a sari or bindi (physical signifiers that she is married) and she did not change her name upon getting married. When Abdes began to actively support her in these choices his family, and particularly his father, became upset with him as well. In Abdes's words: "So many times there was debate in my family but my father was very angry...He thinks that my wife and I are problematic." Abdes described trying to bring open communication into the family, but without success:

We [Abdes and Sangeeta] have a lot of understanding between us but other members of the family are not able to understand this. They have a very oppressive behavior with respect to my wife. Initially, I

created an environment for discussion on all of these issues but I have stopped all of that because my father becomes very violent during those discussions, so the possibility of discussions has also stopped.

The tensions went so far as to impact his five year old son: "My parents are very soft and caring towards my brother's child but not towards mine." Like Samer and Abdesh, many of the MASVAW men found themselves caught between the responsibility of being a husband and that of being a son. Traditionally it is common that if there is a conflict between a man's wife and his parents the man will take his parents' side, requiring his wife to adapt (Purkayastha *et al.*, 2003). But for MASVAW men the opposite often occurred. Men supported their wives, consequently leaving their parents shocked and hurt.

Given the relational and interactional dynamics of gender, an internal contradiction to masculinity not only impacts men but also women. While the wives generally perceived the changes in their husband through a positive lens because it meant greater autonomy and intimacy within their marriages, they often faced significant pressure from their in-laws or extended families with whom they lived. In some cases, the other household members blamed the wives for the changes in the man. One MASVAW man explained that he only helped his wife wash clothing when the extended family was not there. "My wife thinks that they will say that she forces her husband to do everything...whenever there are people around, she doesn't allow me to do anything."

Returning to the case of Abdesh and Sangeeta, we see how Sangeeta relayed that her sister-in-law, a housewife, constantly put her down for being educated and having a full-time job. Her sister-in-law attempted to show her superiority by making efforts to be the "ideal" traditional wife and daughter-in-law. Competition ensued between Sangeeta's and her sister-in-law's children over "who's mommy cares more?" According to Abdesh:

There is no good relationship between my wife and my brother's wife. They don't talk much. There are always these types of problems, because my wife works, my brother's wife has an inferiority complex. So she acts competitively with my wife and it's not good. My wife is caring, respecting. My brother's wife is always trying to win my parent's favor by doing traditional things - wearing a sari, touching their feet, trying to get power.

This atmosphere of hostility was difficult for both Sangeeta and Abdesh. Each of them described how fortunate they felt to have each other, but

they saw familial conflict as one of the costs of their choice to fight for equality. They could not escape patriarchy simply by changing their own behavior. As a result of this tension, Abdesh said that he had given up trying to "develop" his family. He had to balance his satisfaction in doing work he believed in with the difficulties he faced at home.

As seen in the earlier example, some of the wives interviewed described how they limited the amount of domestic assistance they would allow their husbands to perform due to feeling discomfort in letting them engage in household chores. In one case, a wife's mother-in-law was temporarily living with the couple (who otherwise lived in a nuclear family household). When the interviewer asked about her husband helping prepare meals, the wife responded: "My mother-in-law is here nowadays so he doesn't prepare - I don't feel like asking him to do that." After asking if the mother-in-law ever says something, the woman responded "No, I myself feel this, that she will feel odd if her son works. That's why I do it myself." Wives' explanations for why they did not want their husbands to do domestic work varied widely. Some wives themselves held a traditional gender ideology. As a result of this, more than one MASVAW man emphasized that women should attend MASVAW trainings as well so that they might gain greater gender consciousness. Alternatively, those wives who whole-heartedly supported their husband's changes sometimes still felt uncomfortable due to the family pressure and blame they faced. As a result, we found that wives' reactions to their husband's changes were at times ambivalent. On the one hand, they were pleased with their more communicative, equitable relationship; but on the other hand, they had to manage the negative reactions to their husband's new role from other family members. Gender as a social system consists of and is maintained by a series of relationships (Connell, 2009) which means that changes in one arena have subsequent impacts on the lives of others. Any widespread efforts to "undo" gender (Deutsch 2007) must consider and recognize the context and consequences of change within these relationships.

CONCLUSION

As Messner (2000:2) notes, the question is not "can men change" but "how are they changing?" By contextualizing changes to men and masculinity within a relational context, our analysis reveals how men's motivations, efforts and, ultimately, success in challenging hegemonic masculinity is shaped by the other men and women in their lives. Towards this end, our research helps to address a limitation in studies of hegemonic

masculinity by focusing on relationships, particularly with women, as called for by Connell and Messerschmidt, who note (2005: 848) “research on hegemonic masculinity now needs to give much closer attention to the practices of women.” Importantly, men and women can *both* act as allies and challenges in any effort to dismantle hierarchical gender regimes and reimagine hegemonic masculinity. While the wives and fellow members of MASVAW encouraged, educated, provided support and held men accountable to revised visions of manhood, often the men and women within their extended families inhibited these efforts.

Change in gendered behavior, however, as scholars of hybrid masculinities have pointed out, may not always result in a revolutionary dismantling of gender regimes (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). Demetriou (2001), for instance, argues that part of the reason that hegemonic masculinity remains powerful is because it can adapt by pragmatically appropriating what is useful to maintain its power. While we certainly found evidence that the changes to gender consciousness and behaviors remain a work in progress, we follow Sullivan’s (2004) more optimistic perspective that the possibility of true change will likely be slow and incremental but still effect a radical transformation. A “slow drip of change” (Sullivan, 2004: 209), may first begin with men “starting to bend” as one MASVAW respondent explained.

Notes

1. “16 days of Activism Against Gender Violence” is an annual campaign that originated from the first Women’s Global Leadership Institute and began in 1995. Taking place from Nov 25th to December 10th, it focuses on galvanizing action to end violence against women and girls.
2. The absence of accounts regarding women’s influence on the remaining four men does not mean that the influence did not exist, rather that our interviews did not reveal evidence of it. Although this pattern emerged in the majority of our cases, our interview guideline did not directly ask about women’s influence.
3. All of the interviewees’ names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

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