Article

Of Mindsets and Men: Tackling Masculinity, Patriarchy, and Privilege in Delhi

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Amanda Gilbertson[1]

Abstract

As efforts to engage men and boys in gender justice work have proliferated across the globe, so too has evidence of the potential for this work to reinforce rather than deconstruct gender inequalities, resulting in calls to assess the assumptions that underpin this work. Although a significant amount of male-based gender justice work is based in the Global South, analytical literature on efforts to engage men and boys and on pro-feminist men has been largely confined to the Global North. This article responds to the need for a better understanding of how the tensions and risks of involving men in gender justice work are dealt with in the Global South, with an exploration of the narratives of fifteen male and one assigned male at birth (AMAB) middle-class young people working to promote gender equality in New Delhi, India. I demonstrate that there is great diversity in perspectives and approach among male and AMAB gender justice workers in Delhi. While many identified as feminists, felt the need to be accountable to women's organizations and critiqued the idea of men as victims of patriarchy, others distanced themselves from the "radical" and "political" nature of feminism, expressed concerns about the centrality of women in gender justice work and framed men as equal victims of patriarchy. I argue that the latter approach is underpinned by a focus on "mind sets" and individuals as the locus of change. In the absence of discussion of power, the structural and the political, a focus on the personal risks creating room to question the extent of female

[1] Australia India Institute, University of Melbourne, Carlton, Victoria, Australia

Corresponding Author:
Amanda Gilbertson, Australia India Institute, University of Melbourne, 147-149 Barry Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia.
Email: amanda.gilbertson@unimelb.edu.au

oppression and male privilege, undermining feminist goals in the interests of a more "inclusive" approach to gender justice.

Keywords

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Men's responsibility for promoting gender equality was highlighted at United Nations conferences in 1994 and 1995, and since then "engaging men" has become an increasingly common element of gender justice work across the globe. The growing body of literature evaluating male-targeted gender justice programs suggests that some well-designed interventions have been effective in preventing and reducing men's violence against women (Flood 2015, 2–3; Fulu, Kerr-Wilson, and Lang 2014, 19–24). However, a number of risks associated with involving men in gender justice have been identified, including diverting resources away from support for survivors of violence and diminishing the legitimacy of women-only and women-focused programs and services (Flood 2015; Chant and Gutmann 2000, 270; Meer 2011). There is some evidence that, despite the best intentions, efforts to engage men in gender justice can fail—reinforcing rather than deconstructing gender stereotypes (Bridges 2010; Macomber 2012; Casey and Smith 2010, 968). Recently, there have been calls to assess the assumptions that underpin this work (Flood 2015), particularly the focus on attitudinal change rather than the changes in structural relations and social practices (Pease and Flood 2008).

As men and boys have increasingly become the *targets* of gender justice work, men have also increasingly become the *agents* of this work as pro-feminist allies, to use a popular phrase from the United States. Here too there are tensions, as men's growing visibility in gender justice work risks making the long history of women's activism and institution building less visible and silencing their voices in the present (Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015, 136). Men doing this work often get more attention and respect for saying things women have been saying for years, but are also subject to skepticism and critique (Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015; Macomber 2012). Earlier, scholars and activists were hesitant about the possibility of male feminists, arguing that men can *believe* in feminism, but to *be* a feminist requires "the felt experience of oppression" (Kimmel 1992, 3) and that it may not be possible for men to give up their privilege to the extent that they stop being a part of the problem (Kahane 1998). Feminism has more recently come to be widely understood as a perspective on gender equality that can be taken by a person of any gender (Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015), but the framing of the growing number of men identifying as feminists as evidence of the "success" of feminism, its respectability and increasingly positive image, has been cause for concern (Cobb 2015).

While a significant amount of male-based gender justice work is being done in the Global South and this is reflected in the evaluation literature, the vast majority of

the analytical literature on engaging men and pro-feminist men is focused on the Global North. This is particularly the case in relation to studies of the identities and approaches of men involved in gender justice work (Macomber 2012; Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015; Funk 2008; Kimmel 1992). We therefore know little about how and why men in the Global South get involved in gender justice work, how they view feminism, and the assumptions that underpin efforts to engage men and boys. This article explores how some important issues in the engaging men literature are playing out in India.

According to prominent feminist activist Kamla Bhasin (2004, 3), demands for specific initiatives to engage men and boys in gender justice work began to emerge in India in the 1990s—rural women who were members of women's consciousness raising groups felt it was time for their men to be "sensitized," and activists, donors, and development professionals felt that men within development organizations needed greater gender awareness. Early organizations working to challenge patriarchal masculinities and engage men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence in India included Purush Uvach, formed in Pune in 1987, Men Against Violence and Abuse, established in Mumbai in 1993 (Kulkarni 2013, 62), Praajak, founded in Kolkata in 1997 (Bandhyopadhyay 2007), and Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women, established in the state of Uttar Pradesh in 2001 (Das et al. 2012; Mogford, Parveen, and Das 2009). Several other organizations instigated male-targeted programs in the years that followed, but it was the participation of many men in the anti-rape protests of December 2012 that sparked heightened debate about the need to engage men and boys in gender justice work and what a feminist approach to doing so might look like (Roy 2012; Misra and Marwah 2015). Since then, "engaging men and boys" initiatives have proliferated. High-profile initiatives have included Bollywood actor and director Farhan Akhtar's Men Against Rape and Discrimination (MARD) campaign and the second MenEngage Global Symposium (Men and Boys for Gender Justice), which was held in Delhi in 2014 and attracted 1,100 participants from ninety-four countries.

The question of men's involvement in gender justice is not a new one in India—scholars have long debated how to interpret the centrality of women's lives for male social reformers in the nineteenth century (Chopra 2011, 144–145). Literature on the contemporary question of men doing feminism in India includes evaluative studies (Achyut et al. 2016; Das et al. 2012; Singh et al. 2011) and life histories of individual male gender justice workers (Chopra 2007), as well as reflections on men's involvement in feminist social research (Chowdhury and Baset 2015, 30), the relationship between masculinity studies and feminism (Srivastava 2015), and the role of entertainment education in engaging men and boys (Lapsansky and Chatterjee 2013). As elsewhere, the necessity of engaging men and boys is widely accepted in India, and the risks and contradictions inherent to this work have been noted (Misra and Marwah 2015). Beyond a few personal reflections (Das and Singh 2014; Sircar 2015; Chowdhury 2013), however, we do not know how men doing gender justice work in India make sense of and negotiate these risks and contradictions.

This article explores the perspectives of fifteen male and one assigned male at birth (AMAB) middle-class young people working to promote gender equality in Delhi. I begin by describing the extent to which they identify as feminists before turning to their views on some of the key tensions identified in the literature: (1) men's roles as allies or leaders, (2) men as victims of patriarchy, (3) a focus on masculinity as potentially eclipsing of men's violence and privilege, and (4) a focus on individual transformation rather than structural change. Evidence from this research provides support for existing claims, particularly those regarding the risk that an individualizing language of sex roles and attitudes may allow an equivalence to be created between the effects of patriarchy on men and women, which can in turn allow gender justice arguments to slide into men's rights arguments (Messner 1998). A key message of this article is diversity—it is certainly not the case that there is one (problematic) model for men and AMAB doing gender justice work in Delhi. All of the men and AMAB in this study were sensitive to the dangers of messages of "good men" as protectors rather than perpetrators, and most actively worked to resolve some of the key challenges and tensions identified in the engaging men literature. However, the approach of *some* of the participants in this study reinforces the importance of accountability to feminist women's organizations and a pro-feminist language of gender relations, power, and male domination in efforts to engage men and boys.

Method

In 2015–2016, I spent seven months in Delhi and interviewed forty-two young people (aged nineteen to thirty-two) involved in a wide range of efforts to promote gender equality in the city—participating in college gender forums; working at established nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); volunteering at new youth-led organizations; participating in citizens' collectives; writing blogs; running social media campaigns; and performing activist music, theater, and spoken word. These young people were recruited by snowball technique. I worked with local research assistants (both female, urban, upper-middle class, and with postgraduate qualifications in social science disciplines) and was able to recruit some participants through their networks. Other interviewees were identified through online research into different organizations working on gender issues in Delhi, and each new interviewee was asked to suggest other organizations and individuals to contact. I also conducted "key informant interviews" with eight older activists, academics, and NGO workers who identified as members of the Indian women's movement, and interviewed an additional five people aged between thirty-five and thirty-nine who saw themselves as located between, and perhaps bridging the gap between, the youth and the matriarchs. All interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded, and transcribed. Most interviews lasted about an hour and covered the following topics: the interviewee's background, how they got involved in gender related work, the nature of their gender justice work, and their views on feminism, gender justice work, and

the response to the December 2012 "Delhi gang rape." Pseudonyms are used for all individuals in this article. In addition to interviews, I attended a number of gender related events in the city—protests, meetings to plan Women's Day events, campaign events on streets and on campuses, film festivals, and college debates.

This article focuses on interviews and other interactions with the fifteen youth participants who identified as male, and one youth participant, Reyansh, who was AMAB and prefers the pronouns he or him or his but identifies as genderqueer. Although many male-targeted programs are run by women and many of my female participants were themselves involved in work of this nature, focusing on the male and AMAB participants in this article allows for consideration of the relationships between their perceptions of *their* role in gender justice work and their thoughts on engaging men and boys more generally. Space does not allow for consideration of how the approaches of male, AMAB, and female participants may have differed. As this was an ethnographic study, my interactions with these young people were not uniform. Fourteen of the sixteen were interviewed alone, but Aamir and David were interviewed together along with two young women who were part of the same campaign. Fourteen of the sixteen were interviewed only once, but I conducted follow-up interviews with Reyansh and Ravi. I also met several participants outside interviews for informal catchups or when I was participating in events run by their organizations. I had more substantial opportunities to observe the work of Ravi, Dev, and Rudra. Ravi was running a college gender forum and invited me and my research assistant to participate in three events organized by the forum—two open-ended discussions and a workshop on consent run by a youth organization. My research assistant attended these events (as a white woman I would have been distractingly conspicuous) and wrote extensive field notes. Ravi also included us on the mailing list for the forum, so that we could access blog entries written by other students participating in the forum. Rudra worked in the "gender peace" NGO that Dev had founded and was leading. In addition to conducting individual interviews with them, I attended a launch of one of their programs and spent two months "interning" at their organization, during which time I participated in a three-day gender workshop that they ran and assisted in an evaluation of their fellowship program, which involved travelling to Bhopal and Jaipur to interview young people who had taken part in the program.

Seven of the male and AMAB participants were upper caste Hindu, two were Muslim, and the others identified their religions as Sikh, Catholic, Meitei, and Jain. Because an aim of this project was to explore the implications of these young people's work for widespread understandings of India's middle class as politically apathetic (e.g., Fernandes and Heller 2006, 510–6), all the young people interviewed were middle class. Given that India's middle class is notoriously difficult to define (Donner and De Neve 2011), a loose definition of middle class is employed here. When I asked participants to describe their journeys to the work they were doing, almost all started by telling me they were from an ordinary or typical middle-class family. Interviewees' parents had undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, worked in white-collar

occupations or in business and had combined incomes of at least INR 50,000 (US$765) per month. The young people themselves had all completed high school and had either completed or were enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. These characteristics make them significantly more affluent than the majority of the Indian population, but in alignment with definitions of a "global middle class" (Meyer and Birdsall 2012). There is ongoing debate within the Indian women's movement about the extent to which urban upper-caste middle-class feminists dominate and low-caste, rural, and working-class women's action and voices are marginalized (Menon-Sen 2001). It would be very interesting, therefore, to explore whether working-class men in India have a different relation to feminism. This, however, is a task for another paper. For now, suffice it to say that the participants in my research operate within an urban upper-caste middle-class NGO-ized space of Indian feminism that dominates but is not representative of all Indian feminisms.

Identity as Feminists

Much research has addressed the current tendency of young *women* to eschew feminist identities (Moi 2006; Aronson 2003). In my own research, many female participants did not identify as feminists for reasons ranging from a general distaste for labels and politics to closer identification with other "-isms." My intention here, then, is not to suggest that male and AMAB participants' varied levels of identification with feminism reflect a problem inherent to men and AMAB doing feminism but rather to explore links between the ways they reasoned through this identity and their approach to gender justice work more generally.

Some participants emphatically identified as feminists. Aarav, for example, was a thirty-two year-old director of a youth-led NGO and a queer activist, but he said, "my entry in talking about gender was always from . . . a feminism and women's equality space, and not through that sexuality space, so that's my primary identification." Pranav (twenty-six years old) worked in communications and had been involved with gender justice campaigns for several years. When I asked him whether he identified as a feminist, he replied "absolutely." He said it had "been a very long and a bumpy ride" for him because he had grown up with the "very flawed" idea that feminism was "the idea that women are superior." He said that not too long ago he had been asked the same question in an interview and had replied that he did not think that "labels matter to me as much." Today,

> I still don't want to put a label around it and say this is what a feminist is. I still feel it is important to question yourself. But if I look back, every single thing I believe in, every single thing I stand for, is feminist. It has taken me a very long time for me to say definitely I identify as a feminist.

Most of the men who identified strongly as feminists described this as a slow journey, involving many years of reading and learning from senior feminists. They

were critical of those who do not identify as feminists and associated this with misconceptions about feminism that could be rectified through reading and discussion.

Others were more cautious about identifying as feminists. Shaurya (twenty-four years old) was a member of his college's queer collective. He said that although he has feminist friends, is sensitive to women's issues, and is active in gender-related causes, "I actually don't know enough of feminism to actually know if I am a feminist." He pondered further and then came to the conclusion that his maleness meant he could not fully adopt a feminist identity: "Let me not say that I have become feminist or I have become totally unpatriarchal. I wouldn't say that." He said he did not want to "clamour the space" of feminism, evoking a noisy occupation of territory, "because someone who knows their feminism, knows they are feminist, that is something I would give it to them." Ravi was a twenty year-old student at a prestigious engineering college where roughly 90% of students are male. He ran the college gender forum but felt unsure of whether he should identify as a feminist. He explained that he still struggles to move away from some of the conservative ideas about gender he had been raised with and so he thinks he is not sufficiently sensitized to be a feminist. Here, he frames feminism as an achievement that he is working toward. Shaurya and Ravi both described their lack of feminism in ways that were consistent with Kahane's (1998) thoughts on "male feminism as oxymoron": "even if men become part of the solution and find rewards in this role, we shouldn't deceive ourselves that we can cease being part of the problem" (p. 213).

Some male participants explained their lack of feminist identity by saying that they were concerned with equality more generally. Several of these young men had had less substantial involvements in gender justice work than the more strongly feminist-identifying young men. For example, two (both aged twenty-two) had recently started a campaign to do with menstrual taboos at their college, their first foray into gender justice work. When explaining others' reactions to them, Aamir asserted that they were not "radical feminists" or "feminazis" but were just "normal kids in Delhi." When I asked them directly whether they identify as feminists, they said:

David: We both are not feminists at the moment. Like we do things; we don't . . . .
Aamir: Label it. We are just here because we care about people around us. That is why we are here.
David: It's basically about equality; we want everyone to be equal in this country or in this world.

Another participant, Sanjay was a twenty-one year-old actor who occasionally performed street theater on sexual harassment for a major gender justice NGO. He said he did not identify as a feminist because he believed in gender equality and problems are faced by all genders.

One might hypothesize that Aamir, David, and Sanjay are just beginning their involvement in gender justice work and, like Pranav and other "absolutely feminist" participants, might come to feminism slowly through years of reading and discussion. However, others with this kind of reasoning were involved in gender justice work as their primary occupation. For example, Dev was a twenty-six year-old engineering graduate who had established his own "gender peace start-up" in the wake of the anti-rape protests of 2012. He felt that "gender is very different from what the women's movement might broadly be targeting to improve." When I asked him whether he identified as a feminist, he said:

> We keep joking around on whether we should be feminists or we should be "equalists." Who should we be called? . . . There's all kinds of feminists and there's all kinds of feminisms so we are still struggling with that . . . Sometimes other people wouldn't identify me as a feminist . . . because I am a man . . . I feel like I identify with being a feminist but I also identity with other stuff. Having said that, I have met feminists who say exactly the same stuff as me. So yeah, it's a word.

Rudra (twenty-three years old) had studied journalism and worked in government before joining Dev's organization—his first involvement with gender justice. When I asked him whether he identified as a feminist, he said:

> I would like to say yes, but then that may be false because I am confused by the multiple definitions of feminism going around these days. I basically would like to be working for human rights rather than any particular sex's rights. I would rather help you as a human than you as a woman.

What distinguished Dev from other participants was his lack of a sense of accountability to feminist women-led organizations (as I detail below). It was perhaps this that kept him from engaging extensively with such organizations. He received some gender sensitization training as part of a youth leadership program he participated in 2013–2014, but he had not accessed further gender training until 2015 when he attended a five-day "feminism boot camp" run by a prominent feminist human rights organization in Delhi. He received mentoring from senior graduates from his engineering college and through an international youth leadership organization rather than from senior feminists. And his organization did not participate in events that brought other gender-related organizations together such as International Women's Day. He thus appeared not to have embarked on the kind of slow journey toward feminism that Pranav described.

The Role of Men in Gender Justice Work

The language of alliance and accountability is prominent in the literature on men's role in gender justice work. Examples of solidarity and alliance building include pro-feminist men who are working in male-based gender organizations consulting with

women's groups before initiating campaigns, partnering with women's organizations, recognizing and valuing the many years of experience of women's organizations, and being conscious of their privilege and power so as not to dominate voice and space in feminist spaces (Bojin 2013). This is seen as particularly important in the context of scarce funding for gender equality to ensure that male-based organizations are not diverting funds from women's organizations. Several scholars argue that men doing gender justice should be guided by a feminist agenda and "remain accountable to and in dialogue with women's rights movements and organizations" (Peacock and Barker 2014, 582; see also Flood 2011, 360; Macomber 2012; Kahane 1998; Funk 2008, 165;). In their analysis of initiatives to engage men and boys in India, Misra and Marwah (2015, 68) conclude that progressive men who identify as feminist cannot replace women's groups and women must lead the struggle for gender equality (see also Roy 2012).

All participants in my research felt that it was necessary and important to engage men and boys in gender justice work. Their reasons centered on men's roles as perpetrators of violence and oppressors needing to "understand their privilege and then work on it" (Pranav). However, participants differed in the role they saw for men in the movement and their perceptions of women's reactions to them. Several argued that women should lead and set the agenda for gender justice work. Ritvik was twenty-five years old and ran a youth media organization. He said, "Men absolutely need to be engaged as long as they are not the ones deciding for women." Reyansh was twenty-eight years old and worked for an established gender justice NGO. He differentiated his approach from that of other initiatives to engage men that did not identify as feminist: "Our stand is that the women's movement should be our guiding light…It is about engaging men and boys but it is not about men…Holding men accountable should not mean giving them more power." According to Reyansh, "women's movement are a little critical of us." He explained that this was because many men working to engage men and boys in gender justice work are neither coming from nor complying with "feminist praxis." He saw the solutions as deeper dialogue with the women's movement and for those involved in engaging men and boys to take the time to deliberate on how they could make their work more in alignment with feminist praxis.

Speaking about his involvement in gender justice work, Pranav emphasized his limited knowledge and the need to continue to listen:

> I don't feel that I am entitled to talk about these things. I only talk about these things because they are important to me. So I will never assume that I know something, that I know feminism more than somebody else. And especially I believe that I cannot fully understand the intricacies and the detail of, you know, what it means to go through something that I have not gone through. So I will always stop and listen to people.

Pranav had been questioned on many occasions about the appropriateness of men being involved in "the movement." He felt this was "very important criticism" and

"that the best thing I can do is to listen and try to understand what they are saying." He said that, as he had lived most of his life unaware of his privilege, it was possible that today too he could do something problematic without realizing. Reyansh and Pranav accord legitimacy to women's concerns and place an emphasis on listening and learning that is consistent with recommendations made by several scholars for men's engagement with gender justice work (e.g., Macomber 2012).

Some participants were critical of the women's movement for being too focused on women and "elitist" in their judgment of people who did not share their feminist views. Most critical was Dev who, in contrast to Reyansh and Pranav, made it clear that he had started his own organization after realizing he could not be a leader in the women's movement. Although he was sensitive to the fact that this desire to be a leader could be construed as problematic, he did not accord any legitimacy to the concerns of women in the movement, nor did he make connections between his desire to feel unrestricted and a patriarchal sense of entitlement to space:

Dev: I have heard this from multiple people initially that men should not be leaders in the feminist movement so the role I could play was very, at least from the messaging I was getting, was restricted to volunteer, participant, supporter, and not somebody who can actually aim to be a part of, to really take this up. So that role, that conflict is something that I would typically face in the women's movement . . . It's not that natural for them to just accept a man to take up too much space in that and so there is a slight conflict also there.

Author: And why is it important to you that you are a leader rather than a participant?

Dev: It's not, but it's important for me to not feel restricted.

Dev complained that most of the funding was for violence against women or women's rights work and for organizations led and managed by women. He was troubled by the frequency with which his ability to do gender-related work was questioned. He interpreted this viewpoint as one of "Men can't understand women's issues because they have dicks" and argued that people who challenge him are reproducing the very stereotypes they claim to be challenging. He asks such people, "What is different about me except my body?" Here he uses a feminist critique of biological determinism to assert his equal right to work for gender justice in a manner that ignores issues of male power and privilege. Several scholars and activists have expressed exasperation at the notion that the small numbers of men involved in gender justice work is a sign that women should be trying harder to persuade men to get involved and thank them when they do so (Turquet 2010; Win 2010; Cornwall, Armas, and Botha 2012). When Dev talked about his difficulties with what he called "strong, sharp feminists" and described them as insufficiently inclusive, he appeared to be endorsing exactly this notion.

Approach to Engaging Men and Boys

Another key area of concern in efforts to engage men and boys in gender justice work is that there is a tendency to focus on the harms of patriarchy for men, which deflects attention from the disproportionate harms experienced by women and men's responsibility for these harms (Win 2010; Cornwall, Edström, and Greig 2011, 5; Greig 2011, 232). Flood (2015, 9) argues that in some ways "men will 'lose' from progress towards non-violence and gender equality" and that efforts to engage men and boys in gender justice work should acknowledge this. He concludes that "the overarching reason for men to support an end to violence against women should be ethical, moral, or political" rather than their own potential gains. In the Indian context, Misra and Marwah differentiate between an intrinsic approach to engaging men—for their own sake, because they too suffer the effects of hegemonic masculinity—and an instrumental approach—for the benefit of women and girls. They observe that most Indian initiatives combine the two approaches. Instrumentalist approaches, they argue, should avoid patriarchal protectionism (women-as-victims and men-as-saviors) and intrinsic approaches should avoid suggesting that men are equally vulnerable to patriarchy: "work with men needs to recognise how patriarchy implicates them and make them accountable for it" (Misra and Marwah 2015, p.65).

Participants in my research differed in their views on the message that men are also harmed by patriarchy. Kabir (twenty-three years old) was very critical of campaigns that promoted this message: "we have meninism just to say that 'Oh my god, men are also troubled'. No that is crap. Patriarchy gives men a lot of privileges also." Reyansh, who worked at the same organization as Kabir, also associated such an approach with the men's movement:

> We would say men are not victims of patriarchy, but men are limited by patriarchy. We can say women are victims of patriarchy, transgender are victims of patriarchy, but you cannot call men victims of patriarchy because then it trivializes the whole oppression in that angle . . . . One of our articulations is that gender justice can liberate men from certain unwanted conditioning, unwanted pressure. But we are not going to conflate it with women's oppression. That is where we make a difference. Men's movement is all about saying men also need protection and their whole praxis is based on that.

In contrast, Ravi argued forcefully for a view of gender equality in which women were equally culpable and men were equally disadvantaged and was particularly concerned about the phenomenon of false accusations in rape cases. He explained: "if we look at things in an unbiased way, if we embrace equality, it's not the women who are to be actually benefitted; it's also the men who are going to be benefitted." Dev said someone needs to explicitly create a space for talking about women's oppression, but there is also a need for organizations like

his that take a more inclusive approach. Dev actively distanced his work from others who focus on masculinity. He described masculinity programs as "essentially instrumental. It's intervening with men for the sake of women. So it's not meant for direct benefit to the participant." In contrast, his organization believes "in broadly intrinsic intervention, which means intervening for the participant's sake." He argued that "everybody is a kind of a victim and a perpetrator" and there is nothing to be gained by trying to assert that the violence experienced by one gender is greater than the violence experienced by another. Focusing on individuals rather than categories of men and women provided the framework for creating a symmetry between the effects of patriarchy on men and women:

> We try and intensively work with individuals. So at an individual level the statistics kind of dilute themselves .... If there is some girl in this session and some boy, they don't have to compete for whose violence is greater because they are individuals. Neither of them represent the collective of women or men, and neither do I represent any collective of anybody, right? ... There's different amounts of violence against different genders and I don't know who has more ... but we are not working on advocacy or discourse or training sessions for activists, so to say, so we never have to match who should get it first. We're just trying to work with a smaller than usual group of people and trying to help them create a less violent social experience for themselves.

The potential shortcomings of such an individualizing approach are discussed in the final section of this article.

Dev and Ravi's approach to gender equality thus frames men and women's as equal victims of patriarchy and does not require any dismantling of institutional sexism and male privilege.

Together with a focus on the harms of patriarchy for men, efforts to engage men and boys are often characterized by a focus on masculinity as the source of the problem. Macomber (2012, 141) has argued in her research on engaging men and boys in gender justice work in the United States that there is focus on reforming masculinities rather than destroying masculinities and that this is a less radical position used to make gender justice appealing to a wide range of men. In my research, some participants directly stated that reforming masculinities was an inappropriate objective and that "demolishing" or "debunking" masculinities should be the aim. All criticized efforts to engage men and boys by appealing to them as men as well as messages of protecting women. Dev, for example, admitted that he had entered gender justice work with a desire to improve women's safety and the initial focus of his organization had been a safety-related mobile application. However, he said he had since realized that this focus on safety is highly protectionist and is often used as a justification for further restrictions and surveillance for women. Several participants expressed concerns about the patriarchal

protectionism and gender binary of the United Nations campaign HeForShe, and some suggested that HeWithShe would have been a better name. Most criticized Farhan Akhtar's MARD campaign. Pranav, for example, was worried that the conversation about the need to engage men and boys would be "derailed" by these patriarchal messages "that men will save the day; men are required to stop harassment; men can protect women." I observed none of the appeals to good men in the work of my participants that others have identified as problematic in their research (Macomber 2012; Salter 2015).

Macomber (2012, 41) takes her argument a step further, arguing that male gender justice workers' separation of "men" from "masculinity" enabled them to "critique the social construction of gender, but still feel good about who they were, at their core." Conversely, Reyansh argued that we need *more* distance between masculinities and men: "I try my best to refrain from trying to locate the problem in a particular type of body. I always make it a sense of how the problem lies in a social mentality and how it gets acted out through different bodies." However, the equivalence created between the effects of patriarchy on men and women in the narratives of Ravi and Dev suggests that any further attempts to distance masculinities from men may compound the difficulties of getting men to reflect on their own power and privilege, as Macomber asserts. As the following section will demonstrate, this may have less to do with the desexing of masculinity and more to do with an understanding of masculinity as a "mind-set" and an approach to gender inequality as an issue of interpersonal prejudice and violence rather than as something structural and institutional.

Individual and Personal versus Structural

An emerging critique of efforts to engage men and boys in gender justice work is that it is overly focused on the personal and on individual transformation and insufficiently attentive to structural and political issues. Several scholars have raised concerns about the selective and partial gender agenda taken up by initiatives to engage men and boys. Such initiatives have a tendency to focus on personal change in the context of individual lives rather than the public sphere, the political, the economic, and the structural. For Cornwall, Edström, and Greig (2011), this arises from a focus on behavior and cultural and social norms; for Pease and Flood, it is associated with a focus on attitudes. Both Greig (2011) and Messner (1997) are concerned by the tendency of efforts to engage men and boys to be framed in terms of violence prevention, which reduces gender equality to an issue of interpersonal violence. Greig (2011) argues that violence is framed in these contexts "in terms of culture and not politics, socialization not oppression" (p. 225), and change is located in individual male bodies rather than powerful institutions. As such, "the field has contributed to a domestication of the ways in which the gendered violence of the social order is understood and addressed" (p. 225). He calls for better linking of interpersonal, state, and structural violence. Messner (1997) similarly contends that

the focus on interpersonal violence "tends to lead activists away from the engage-ment with structured inequality within social institutions such as workplaces, fam-ilies and the state" (p. 55). This was an issue for the male gender justice workers interviewed by Bojin (2013, 373) who all saw their work as political but found it difficult to see their focus on the private sphere as connected to social institutions and public policy. Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz (2015) suggest that the goal of individual change embedded in many initiatives to engage men and boys "is a far cry from the sorts of radical social change needed to prevent sexual violence on a larger scale."

Some participants in my research were aware of and in agreement with such concerns. When I asked Aarav what he would like to have done differently in his youth leadership work, he said:

> The only thing we could have put more emphasis on perhaps was on building young people's acknowledgment and interaction with larger political movements that are happening around young people. So you train young people to think about who they are and what they want to be in terms of exploring themselves, but a deeper exploration of what are the structures of marginalization, human rights violations, and political movements that they are going up around, perhaps it could have intensified that work.

Reyansh differentiated his organization's work from that of other, less feminist, organizations that he saw as overly focused on individual change: "we look at it as a social movement. For example, our articulation about what men and boys should do is put in the context of social change. Their articulation is about individuals. Their articulation is mostly individual change." He acknowledged that some of these organizations intended to add a social change perspective later, but he did not approve of this approach:

> It's not like you are trying to give them orientation and then suddenly when you feel like individual change has happened then you can bring in the social change . . . . You are postponing the change you're looking for. I think it's very important to bring in the whole social change part of it even if you are engaging an individual.

However, many participants framed their own work in terms of a focus on "mind-sets" and individual transformation. In explaining the problem of always focusing on women as "sufferers" and men as "the ones who are creating that suffering," Ravi said: "it's about a mind-set and even women can be sexist, even men can be sex-ist . . . . Your struggle should be against a mind-set and not against men . . . . We need to focus on the mind-set . . . instead of focusing on a specific sex of people." Accord-ing to Dev, his organization focuses on changing cultural beliefs, social norms and mind sets, which he identifies as a "root cause solution." Although Dev defined beliefs and norms as social and cultural, he was focused on individual experiences of

gender and violence and said that there is a "huge spirit of self-work" in his approach. He explained:

> It's more from the perspective of a person experiencing violence rather than from the perspective of law, or from the perspective of a movement . . . . We create a supportive space, a healing space, which acts as something which helps people develop their own power against whatever might be stopping them . . . . We are helping these guys understand how gender plays out in their lives, not in their world . . . we won't be discussing the structures.

In the three-day workshop that Dev facilitated as part of his organization's fellowship program, students played a game known as "telephone" in the United States and as "Chinese whispers" in India. In this game, one player whispers a message in the ear of another player, who in turn whispers it to another and so on, until the message has been passed to the final player. The objective is for the message to be delivered without modification to the final player, but it inevitably gets garbled. Dev explained that this game was a metaphor for patriarchy, and in doing so, he framed patriarchy as a series of misunderstandings between individuals rather than a *system* of male supremacy that is institutionalized and has an internal logic. Dev also argued that people should stop using gender labels, but as an extensive literature on caste (Deshpande 2013), class (Skeggs 1997), and race (Gilroy 2000) reminds us, the notion that inequalities will disappear if we simply ignore the relevant social categories can only be entertained by those in positions of privilege whose identities operate as the unmarked norm.

The focus on attitudes or mind sets was not unique to my male and AMAB research participants or to those specifically involved in engaging men and boys. Nor was it unique to those who showed discomfort with acknowledging male privilege. What this research shows, then, is not that the concept of mind sets is in itself a problematic by-product of efforts to engage men. Rather, when articulated in the absence of discussions of male privilege, group power relations, and institutionalized sexism, this language is depoliticizing and individualizing. Notably, whereas most who identified emphatically as feminists declared that "everything is political," the others were clear that their work was *not* political. While the problem may be mind sets and not men, it seems that in some initiatives, the role of these mind sets in privileging men and their emergence through social and political relations of power has been lost in a focus on the personal. Furthermore, the failure to connect the private and the public, the personal and the structural facilitates a focus on male victimhood to which I now turn.

Sex Roles and Men's Rights

Writing on Men's Rights Activists in India, Basu (2016) suggests that such activists argue that the Indian Women's Movement has "too much power and too little

fairness" and focus their action on a straw figure version of the rhetoric and politics of feminists (p. 46). She describes these activists as drawing on feminist arguments regarding gender equality to make claims for male disadvantage, while ignoring questions of power (p. 50). The young men who participated in my research criticized and distanced themselves from men's rights activists, but some of them shared perhaps more than they realize with such groups in positioning their work in opposition to a "straw figure" version of the Indian women's movement, in making "not all men" arguments, and in arguing for gender equality and neutrality in a manner in that ignores questions of power and privilege.

The potential for slippage between gender justice and men's rights arguments has been noted elsewhere. Messner (1998) explores how in the United States the men's liberation movement of the early 1970s split by the mid- to late 1970s into an overtly anti-feminist men's rights movement and a profeminist men's movement. He argues that the language of sex roles was integral to this history, underpinning both the promise and the eventual demise of the men's liberation movement. The promise lay in the break from biological determinism and the call for less sex role stereotypical socialization processes. The demise lay in the tendency for sex roles to be conceptualized as individualistic and voluntaristic without discussion institutionalized sexism and intergroup relations. This allowed for a false symmetry between male and female roles, which began to morph into anti-feminist language of male victimization. For these reasons, the pro-feminist men's movement increasingly rejected the language of sex roles in favor of more historicized and politicized language of gender relations, which highlighted the ways that all men gain power and privilege within a patriarchal system.

The language of sex roles is integral to Ravi's and Dev's work (I did not observe gender workshops and discussions run by other participants). The workshops and group discussions I and/or my research assistants attended involved explanations of the difference between sex and gender and extensive sharing of personal experiences of gender policing (facing sanctions for failing to behave in gender normative ways). These sessions were dominated by the individualistic and therapeutic language described above, which constructs sexism as a set of attitudes and values that can be unlearned (Messner 1998). The propensity for such language and framing to slide into men's rights arguments was very clear in in-group discussions held as part the gender forum that Ravi ran. Despite Ravi's best efforts, these discussions turned again and again to "preferential" treatment for women, particularly the fact that there is a separate women's carriage on the Delhi metro and seats reserved for women on buses. The language of male victimhood was also prevalent in blog entries written by students who participated in Ravi's gender forum. One student wrote that benevolent sexism is problematic because it gives males a "minority complex":

> It culturally conditions boys from the day of their birth that men are innately less valuable than women, and that women's wellbeing and whims, should always both

supersede and go at the expense of men . . . women here who think this issue concerns whether or not it's sexist to women or not show how blatantly egocentric they are.

Another wrote "I would also like to make the point that it is not just one side dominating over the other, even the women want all the men to be chivalrous to them and make them do work as per their whims, which is not right."

When I interviewed Ravi for the second time in mid-2016, I asked him about these blogs and he replied:

> I mean when I read a blog, I obviously see that there is an incomplete understanding of feminism, right. But that's good because now at least they have started thinking about feminism, right. So we don't expect people to become pro-feminists after one discussion or two discussions, but when you start thinking about it, that in itself is sort of an achievement, right?

In this interview, Ravi again expressed concerns about feminism and feminists, whom he described as elitist. He explained that feminists often respond harshly to sexist comments and that this reduces the outreach of feminism and prevents dialogue between feminists and nonfeminists:

> A lot of feminist organizations assume that feminism is by default the correct way of life, that gender equality is the correct way of life and anybody who does not believe in that is simply stupid . . . . So what I've seen is there's a feminist page, there's somebody who posts a sexist comment and the reply to that comment is not a justifying comment, it is more of a taunt to that person . . . you won't get the mass outreach that you always wanted . . . there's a lack of dialogue because the feminists always believe that they are correct. See, even if the feminists are always correct, they need to have a good dialogue with the rest of the world.

In contrast, Ravi said, his gender forum provides people with "a safe space to discuss their ideas . . . . And in the end if they feel gender equality is not the right way, so be it."

Several scholars and practitioners have noted the difficult balance that needs to be achieved when engaging men and boys—making gender justice appealing without depoliticizing feminist arguments and reinforcing male privilege (Casey and Smith 2010, 968; Casey et al. 2013, 243–244). One approach to engaging men is to create a "big tent" (Katz 2003) that includes the "average Joe." For example, reflecting on his experience engaging young men in Kolkata, India, Chowdhury (2013) observes that an initial failure to acknowledge the reality of patriarchal power may be necessary in gender training workshops in order to create a space where men can honestly reflect on their experiences of masculinity without moral censure. The approach of both Ravi and Dev appears to be consistent with the notion that "soft" messages are necessary to make gender justice work appealing to men that might find more radical

anti-sexist messaging threatening. However, this research provides support for Messner's (1998, 271) claims that language that fails to address patriarchy as a *system* and men as "a category of people who systematically oppress—and benefit from the oppression of—another category of people, women," can create a framework not for a budding feminist consciousness but rather for an undermining of the feminist assertion that women are systematically oppressed.

Conclusion

Participants in this study were sensitive to many of the common shortcomings of initiatives that engage men and boys in gender justice work—the patriarchal protectionism of focusing on women's safety and the reinforcement of gendered identities and boundaries in appeals to "real men." The majority of participants who had had extended engagement in gender justice work expressed a commitment to feminism, a strong sense of accountability to women's organizations, a critical reflection on discourses of masculinity, and a conviction that structural change is needed. Further exploration of how they translate these thoughts into practice could provide valuable insights into how best to negotiate the risks and tensions inherent to engaging men.

While all participants criticized the men's rights movement, the narratives of Dev and Ravi illustrated the potential for slippage into narratives of male victimhood. After years of gender justice work, Dev remained skeptical of feminism and disapproving of feminists. Perhaps because of a lack of engagement with feminists, he employed a particularly individualizing language that allowed for a false symmetry to be created between the effects of patriarchy on men and women. Ravi saw himself as being on a journey toward a feminist identity and worked hard to engage with feminist organizations and literature, but he too felt that feminists could be more welcoming and forgiving and framed sexism as a problem of mind sets and not men, providing the foundation for a focus on male victimhood in his gender forum. This research supports the necessity of accountability to feminist women's organizations and the importance of a more politicized and historicized language of gender relations that directly addresses male power and privilege and the systemic, structural, and institutional nature of patriarchy. The narratives of Ravi and Dev show that the use of "soft messaging" to appeal to men and boys can lead to gender equality messages not just being diluted but also being co-opted. A focus on the personal is problematic not just because equality is unlikely to be achieved without efforts to address structural relations, but also because without a sense of power as something structural and institutionalized, it is impossible to fully comprehend male privilege.

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Author Biography

Amanda Gilbertson is a lecturer in Youth and Contemporary India at the Australia India Institute at the University of Melbourne. Her research interests lie in the anthropology of class, gender, and youth in South Asia. Her current projects explore the work that young people are doing to promote gender equality in Delhi, the history of "gender sensitization training" in Delhi, and reporting on violence against women in Indian print media. She is the author of *Within the Limits: Moral Boundaries of Class and Gender in Urban India* (OUP 2017).