



# Politicising Masculinities: Beyond the Personal

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## 1 An introduction

... the ‘men as problem, women as victim’ discourse continues to hold sway

‘The spirit of the meeting is of a sense of ascendant possibility and vibrancy against phenomenal odds’ – Jill Lewis, Hampshire College, Amherst, USA

During 15–18 October 2007, a diverse mix of people came together in Dakar, Senegal, to debate issues of men, gender and power: unconventional practical academics, open-minded policymakers, reflective practitioners and activists. It was a unique gathering and offered a unique opportunity – to inform and inspire a greater engagement by men in the struggle for gender justice and broader social change.

### What inspired the symposium?

The symposium was borne out of a realisation that much of the most innovative work on men and masculinities has worked at the level of the personal, such as seeking to transform men’s sexual behaviour, violence against women and relations of fatherhood. The HIV epidemic has forced an open space for greater acknowledgement of the fluidity and diversity of men’s sexual and social identities. But relatively little of the innovative thinking and practice that has taken place in relation to these issues has been carried into other areas of development work. Masculine privilege remains unproblematised in mainstream development; and within gender and development the ‘men as problem, women as victim’ discourse continues to hold sway. Both rest on essentialisms that are rarely brought into question.

At the same time, work on men and masculinities in development has arguably failed to engage sufficiently with core equity issues, whether in terms of equal pay and leave entitlements, representation in



politics, parental rights and benefits, or domestic work, to change the institutions that sustain inequitable gender and sex orders. Amidst recognition that HIV prevention needs to go beyond individual behaviour change and that male violence is also a structural issue, the organisers felt it was time to move the debate beyond the personal to address questions of power and politics.

The symposium was organised, led and facilitated by IDS researchers Andrea Cornwall and Jerker Edström, and Alan Greig, an independent consultant. Baba Goumbala, Regional Representative of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, along with Magatte Mbodj and her staff at the Alliance Nationale Contre le SIDA a Sénégal (ANCS), co-hosted the event, facilitated the local support and encouraged peers in the region to engage. Below they explain their motivations for organising the symposium.

**Andrea Cornwall** I first got into the debates on masculinity in the late 1980s, as they seemed at the time to offer some space for questioning essentialisms about women, as well as about men. Feminist colleagues were mostly disapproving; one spoke for many when she told me, ‘I don’t do men’, others expressed concerns about ‘all this men business’ leaching resources, depoliticising gender work and ending up with men dominating the gender scene as they dominated so much else in development. The official line was that gender is about gender relations, the unofficial line was that gender is about women. Actually, I found the whole gender scene depressing. Not only was it full of the grossest essentialisms, there was also such a reluctance to look at power relations among men or women. And there was a nervousness about bringing any of this into question: we’ve struggled to get where we are and we can’t start unpicking things now, or the whole edifice will come down.

But I was forced to think again about the politics of working with and on men a couple of years ago. I was at a launch for a publication, where



Andrea Cornwall







## What would it take to politicise the debate, to build bridges...?

a panel were to debate feminist futures. The room was full, with around 50 women and five men. The men began berating the lack of male authors in the publication, extolling the importance of involving men, applauding the mobilisation of men against gender violence in the very country from which an activist friend had emailed the previous week saying their funding had been slashed to give to an organisation working with men... Five men colonised the entire discussion. We never did get a chance to consider the future for feminism.

It provoked an epiphany. I began thinking of the problems I had with the concept of 'gender'. Not only because it so easily took discussions like these away from women's rights. But also because it always courted such polarisation of issues that ought to be everyone's concern, not claimed by one group as 'theirs'. And I began thinking of the problems I had with the masculinities debate. Why were so few of the men involved in it talking about equal pay, about men doing an equal share of the housework, about addressing the masculinism in the political arena that makes it so difficult for women to get elected or listened to when they are? Why was it that so little of the innovative work that had been done on men and violence, or men and sex, had carried over into work on men and politics or men and the economy? What would it take to politicise the debate, to build bridges with feminists like me who are not only concerned with injustices women suffer in intimate relationships with men but those which are played out in public – in the workplace, the media, the street, and in the places where the decisions that affect our lives get made?

So that's what motivated me: a combination of irritation and frustration, for the main, but also a sense that perhaps it would be possible to find, again, in debates about masculinities interesting new takes on the rather stale 'gender agenda', and some inspiration for alliance-building and activism in the future.





**Jerker Edström** What motivated me to organise the symposium is not easy to answer. It was personal and beyond... As someone growing up in the years after the sexual revolution in Northern Europe, from boyhood I was exposed – by my mother – to the real and urgent issues of family planning, sexual health, oppression and injustice to women across the world. I have been interested in and working on sexual health and gender issues for most of my life. Before the turn of the century, however, I had realised that what was being done in the name of HIV, gender and sexuality had very little to do with the real lives of most men. Very few of us were anywhere to be seen on these agendas.



Jerker Edström

When I joined IDS last year, I soon engaged with Andrea Cornwall and others on this topic. We started discussions about how the AIDS world was reverting back to more medicalised and simplistic service-provision frameworks, de-sexualising and often ‘mis-gendering’ HIV under the weight of increasingly right-wing hegemonic masculine US power brokers, backed up with massive resources for a global response to AIDS. We also lamented the fact (or perception) that ‘gender’ is no longer really offering us many exciting or helpful conceptual tools, but rather seems to be inadvertently stuck in reconstructing or reinforcing essentialist and ‘heteronormative’ gender binaries.

Certainly, a lot has been learned about HIV from work with men, as well as from work with women – particularly sex workers. But the issues are not being heard loud enough and some of the lessons are not being considered critically. So we wanted to engage more directly with those most engaged with the issues and try to make a contribution to advancing our collective thinking. We thought the best way to start would be to call a big meeting of some of the best people we knew from around the world, who are dealing with these issues in their work and lives...







Alan Greig

**Alan Greig** I have been concerned for some time about the evolving nature of the ‘men and masculinities’ discourse in the fields of HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health and rights more generally, and violence prevention and intervention work with men. My interest in the gender dimension of work in these interrelated fields was sparked not only by the stark realities of who got sick and who got hurt, but also by a dissatisfaction with the crude gender analyses that sought to explain these realities in terms of the oppressive male and the oppressed female. I wanted more complex accounts of vulnerability and violence. Such accounts would be interested in men’s gendered subjectivity as well as their exercise of male privilege, and in men’s multiple locations within systems of oppression together with their patriarchal power. I was drawn to thinking, talking and writing about masculinity in order to contribute to such accounts, within a broader commitment to feminist and queer politics.

But in the course of this work, I have been struck by the extent to which emerging discourses of ‘men and masculinities’ have been ready to focus on ‘men’s gendered subjectivity’ to the neglect of addressing ‘their exercise of male privilege’. An interest in men’s personal motivations for, and processes of, change in their own gender attitudes and practices has obscured larger political questions about structures of power and their sustaining gender ideologies, and men’s relationship to these in terms of complicity and accountability. As I wrote in an early email while planning the symposium:

*The work I am doing here in the USA uses a language of ‘male supremacy and masculinity’, to draw attention to, and make distinctions between, gender regimes of identity, identification and representation (masculinity/ties) and gender regimes of power and oppression (male supremacy). The language of male supremacy has also helped to reach the parts that other terms (‘patriarchy’) no longer succeed in reaching, in part because they have atrophied in to cliché and in part because of the success of the conservative*





*politics of much of the masculinities discourse, which rather than highlighting and exploring issues of structural/institutional power and injustice has tended to obfuscate them with an emphasis on men's personal gender trouble (the world would be a better place if we had a different masculinity for men).*

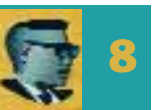
*This to me is the crux of what this meeting can be about – exploring the political implications of current masculinities discourses (in different policy/programme areas and academic fields), excavating their relationship to the gender binary (in which only men 'have' masculinity), relating the concepts of gender and power that are enshrined in this binary to other understandings and practices of gender in the world (while noting the ways in which Northern-generated masculinities discourses are 'colonising' local understandings, meanings and practices) and bringing all this back to issues of social justice and social change, and what this means in terms of the work needed to challenge male supremacist ideologies, practices and institutions and the roles/responsibilities of the heterogeneous category of 'men' in this work.*

### **Baba Gumbala, International HIV/AIDS Alliance, Senegal**

As a broad alliance of non-governmental organisations supporting communities to respond to HIV in Africa (and the world), it was a great pleasure for the Alliance to co-host the masculinities symposium in Dakar, in partnership with IDS and our linking organisation in Senegal (ANCS). Gender and masculinities are one of the most important drivers of HIV in Africa. At the community level, individuals and groups responding to HIV are constantly trying to overcome these barriers with very little knowledge and means. The symposium was a unique opportunity to bridge the gaps between researchers, practitioners and activists, and to identify strategies for change.



Baba Gumbala





Aminata Toure and Emily Esplen during the opening exercise

## Who was there?

‘Bringing together a diverse mix of people... that made it a unique space’ – Gary Barker, Institute Promundo, Brazil

Forty-three participants came together for the symposium, from a range of sectors, disciplines, regions and perspectives, including academics, practitioners, activists and policymakers, and comprising roughly equal numbers of women and men (19 and 22 respectively). Participants arrived from countries as diverse as Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, the USA and Europe! See page 10 for a full list of participants.

## What do we mean by ‘masculinities’?

Since the 1980s, considerable research has been done to try to develop a better understanding of ‘masculinities’. What has become clear is that there is no single version of masculinity. Rather, constructions of masculinity vary over time and across and within cultures, creating a multiplicity of masculinities (see page 18). Below are some of the diverse understandings of masculinity held by participants.

‘Masculinities... our sense of what men can become, shaped by many forces – economic, political, cultural and also by femininities’  
– Annie George, Project Parivartan, India

‘Masculinity? It’s about men perceiving and thinking about... the benefits and the enormous power they have which gives them access to such privilege in society’ – Mbuyiselo Botha, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa





## Symposium participants

<b>Akshay Khanna</b>	University of Edinburgh and Prism	UK, India
<b>Alan Greig</b>	Independent consultant	USA
<b>Aminata Toure</b>	UNFPA	USA
<b>Anders Ragnarsson</b>	Karolinska Institutet	South Africa
<b>Andrea Cornwall</b>	IDS	UK
<b>Anne Skjelmerud</b>	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)	Norway
<b>Annie George</b>	Project Parivartan, Yale	India
<b>Baba Goumbala</b>	International HIV/AIDS Alliance	Senegal
<b>Bafana Khumalo</b>	Sonke Gender Justice	South Africa
<b>Benedito Medrado</b>	Instituto Papai	Brazil
<b>Berthilde Gahongayire</b>	UNAIDS	Senegal
<b>Cheryl Overs</b>	Network for Sex Work Projects (NWSP)	UK
<b>Chimaraoke Izugbara</b>	African Population and Health Research Centre	Kenya
<b>Chris Dolan</b>	Refugee Law Project, Faculty of Law, Makerere University	Uganda
<b>Colette Harris</b>	University of East Anglia	UK
<b>Dean Peacock</b>	Sonke Gender Justice	South Africa
<b>Emily Esplen</b>	BRIDGE, IDS	UK
<b>Gareth Coats</b>	Southern African AIDS Trust	South Africa
<b>Gary Barker</b>	Institute Promundo	Brazil
<b>Henry Armas</b>	Institute of Social Studies	The Netherlands
<b>Jean-Louis Rodriguez</b>	Alliance Nationale Contre le SIDA (ANCS)	Senegal
<b>Jerker Edström</b>	IDS	UK
<b>Jill Lewis</b>	Hampshire College, Amherst and Norwegian Refugee Council	USA, Norway
<b>Jorge Lyra</b>	Instituto Papai	Brazil

Participants arrived from Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, the USA and Europe





[They] included  
academics, activists,  
practitioners and  
policymakers

<b>Lydia Saloukou Reine</b>	Initiative Privée et Communautaire contre le SIDA (Burkina Faso) (IPC/BF)	Burkina Faso
<b>Magatte Mboj</b>	ANCS	Senegal
<b>Margrethe Silberschmidt</b>	Institute of Public Health, Dept of Women and Gender in Medicine, University of Copenhagen	Denmark
<b>Mariana Vazquez</b>	Fundacion HUESPED	Argentina
<b>Mbuyiselo Botha</b>	University of KwaZulu-Natal	South Africa
<b>Ndeye Astou Diop</b>	ABOYA (community partner of ANCS)	Senegal
<b>Patrick Welsh</b>	Association of Men Against Violence (AHCV)	Nicaragua
<b>Paul Dover</b>	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)	Sweden
<b>Petra Bongartz</b>	IDS	UK
<b>Phumzile Nywagi</b>	Khululeka	South Africa
<b>Pum Sophiny</b>	Khmer HIV/AIDS NGO Alliance (KHANA)	Cambodia
<b>Raewyn Connell</b>	University of Sydney	Australia
<b>Robert Morrell</b>	School of Education Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal	South Africa
<b>Said Bisbis</b>	Association Marocaine de Solidarité et Développement (AMSED)	Morocco
<b>Samia Afroz Rahim</b>	BRAC University	Bangladesh
<b>Simon Mutonyi</b>	Support to the HIV/AIDS Response in Zambia (SHARe)	Zambia
<b>Steven Robins</b>	Dept of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the University of Stellenbosch	South Africa
<b>Sunita Grote</b>	International HIV/AIDS Alliance	UK
<b>Tessa Lewin</b>	IDS	UK





'[Traditional patriarchal masculinities] are defined in relation to who as men we should *not* be: neither women nor homosexuals... as such they are seeped in homophobia and misogyny' – Patrick Welsh, Association of Men Against Violence (AHCV), Nicaragua

'I have tried to define “masculinity” through my research and theoretical work, which has led me to the view that there is no such thing as “masculinity” – in the singular. Rather, there are multiple masculinities in the world, representing different patterns of practice associated with the positions of men in various gender systems’ – Raewyn Connell, University of Sydney, Australia

'Masculinities are not just about men; women perform and produce the meaning and practices of the masculine as well. But masculinities are always about a difference from the feminine, a difference that has come to signify the differences in power between men and women in the many societies in which the “female” gender is positioned in subordinate relation to the “male”’ – Alan Greig, independent consultant, USA



Raewyn Connell sharing ideas with Andrea Cornwall

## Why is it important to understand masculinities?

There has been considerable uncertainty and resistance to including 'masculinities' in gender and development work – driven by fears about the dilution of the feminist agenda and anxieties over the diversion of limited resources away from women's empowerment initiatives and back into the hands of men. Below, three symposium participants explain why they believe it is so important for the development industry to understand and engage with issues of men and masculinities:





Samia Rahim and Akshay Khanna  
during the opening exercise

‘... because it [masculinity] is invested in intricate ways in the structures of our societies and in the relationships we have. Understanding masculinity and transforming it in positive ways will go a long way in bringing about a fairer, more just and happier world’ – Samia Afroz Rahim, BRAC University, Bangladesh

‘... because it is a significant mode and idiom through which political economies are structured, empire is transacted and fundamentalisms produced’ – Akshay Khanna, University of Edinburgh, UK, and Prism, India

‘... because they [masculinities] define agendas for being a man which shape how men and women act, how institutions work, how culture operates – with consequences ranging from war and economic exploitation to greater/lesser degrees of trust and democracy in intimate relations’ – Raewyn Connell, University of Sydney, Australia





## Symposium agenda

### Day 1 Exploring gender, power and change

- 9.00–10.30 Introductions  
Coffee break  
11.00–12.30 **From the personal to the political**  
Sharing our own trajectories – personal, professional, political
- 14.00–15.30 **Concerns from the field**  
Emerging concerns and questions about discourses of ‘men, gender and power’ across different fields and disciplines
- Coffee break  
16.00–17.00 **Men, gender and power**  
Critical perspectives on trajectories of theory, policy and practice on men, masculinities, gender and power – past, present and future
- 17.00–17.30 **Close and emerging issues**

### Day 2 Learning from change

- 9.00–10.30 **Histories and forces**  
Raewyn Connell reflects on the history of investigations into and discourses of masculinity
- Coffee break  
11.00–12.30 **‘Hard Talk’: Politicising masculinities in practice**
- Lunch  
14.00–15.30 **Theory/politics/practice**  
Small groups organised around pre-circulated papers, to deepen discussion, share experiences and air emerging ideas and concerns

- Coffee break  
16.00–16.30  
16.30–17.00  
17.00–17.30
- Commentaries and reflections**  
**Forming ‘affinity groups’**  
**Close and emerging issues**

### Day 3 Making change I: strategies and opportunities

- 9.00–10.30 **Affinity group work**  
Articulating a vision and strategies for politicising masculinities work in terms of area/issue of affinity
- Coffee break  
11.00–12.30 **Plenary**  
Sharing group work, commentaries and reflections
- Lunch  
14.00
- Afternoon off!**  
Resting, shopping, self-organised activities and outings

### Day 4 Making change II: tools and alliances

- 9.00–10.30 **Affinity group work**  
Identifying tools and networks needed to implement strategies identified on day 3
- Coffee break  
11.00–12.30 **Plenary**  
Sharing group work, commentaries and reflections
- Lunch  
14.00–15.30 **SOSOTEC**  
An exercise designed to generate ideas, energy and actions that can take tasks/issues/projects forward...
- Coffee break  
16.00–16.30  
16.30–17.00  
Evening
- Closing commentaries and reflections**  
**Close**  
**Party!**





## 2 The process

‘At one point in the lead up to the workshop I actually felt a bit overwhelmed by the thought of endless academic papers being delivered in the traditional conference format. However, the interactive, participatory approach really facilitated mutual learning to take place in a creative and stimulating way’ – Patrick Welsh, Association of Men Against Violence (AHCV), Nicaragua

To facilitate real dialogues across the different sectors, or worlds, the gathering was called a ‘symposium’ and no-one was allowed to lecture in long monologues. Instead, the organisers opted for an interactive, participatory process to allow maximum opportunities for sharing and learning. Below is a day-by-day description of the symposium process.

### Day 1 Exploring gender, power and change

To get participants talking and laughing together, Henry Armas led the group in an ice-breaker, asking participants a series of creative questions, such as: How long have you been working on masculinities? If you were a colour, what colour would you be and why? How masculine or feminine do you feel? After each question, participants lined up depending on their responses and shared their answers with those around them.

#### Exploring the personal and political in participants’ own lives

How does the personal and political intersect in participants’ own lives? To explore and share significant moments in people’s own journeys towards greater consciousness of the need for gender transformation, the group participated in a ‘gender/power lines





exercise'. Participants drew personal lifelines, marking moments of change in terms of their own gender identities, practices and relations.

## Concerns from the field

The next exercise helped to explore the issues on people's minds in relation to politicising masculinities. Each person wrote down concerns or questions about men, gender and power relating to their own field of work and shared them with someone from the same field. Each pair joined with another pair from a different field to discuss similarities and differences in the issues raised. Finally, each group of four joined with another group of four to distil the concerns and write them on cards, which were then posted on the wall. This set an 'agenda' for the meeting. Questions raised included:

Should development be concerned with a sense of self?

How can we ensure that issues of social and economic inequality are integral to our discussions?

How does 'agency' figure in stereotypical constructions of men as abusers and women as victims?

How are norms reproduced in the ways we gather and produce knowledge?

How can we build and maintain solidarity with other social movements such as the feminist movement or gay movement?

How can we think about the dynamics of vulnerability and issues of risk, power, control and sexuality?

How can we share approaches across contexts, while at the same time being sensitive to context?







How does agenda setting by the global north limit our understanding of men and masculinities in the global south? Does it result in racist discourses?

What role should women play in politicising masculinity?

Which men are we talking about?



Mariana Vazquez and Magatte Mbodj sharing their concerns from the field

Issues which emerged from this exercise included:

- Questions were raised around language, definitions and stereotypes – about how to break away from binary concepts of gender and essentialist understandings of women and men without losing sight of structural inequities and inequalities.
- Another cluster formed around issues of men's victimisation, self-blame, and vulnerability – also asking how this relates to male privilege and accountability.
- Others pointed to the economic, social and cultural differences among men and emphasised the necessity of contextualising work with men.
- Several participants highlighted the need to work differently with institutions to politicise work on men and masculinities.
- Others focused on how to strengthen inclusive social movements through forging alliances between different groups working for gender equality and social justice.

The first day of the symposium was drawn to a close by Robert Morrell, Samia Afroz Rahim and Jill Lewis who offered their reflections, highlights and moments of inspiration from the day. Jill succinctly captured the sentiment in the room, noting that:

'There is a feeling of intense desire and anxiety at the same time... relating to the urgent need for a new kind of work on masculinities to transform gender work'.





## Some notes on masculinities\*

**Multiplicity** There is no single version of masculinity that is found everywhere. Constructions of masculinity differ from one culture to another, and from one historical moment to another. Further, multiple masculinities (defined either as identities or as patterns of practice) are found even within one culture or organisation. There is now abundant evidence on this point too, for instance from studies of youth, which show multiple paths of development for boys. These findings argue powerfully against the idea that a violent, aggressive masculinity is 'natural' or biologically fixed. They suggest the importance of getting local information to inform action on issues involving masculinity.

**Relations among masculinities** Gender structures, involving relations between women and men, also involve relations among groups of men (and to a more limited extent among women) in the form of linked constructions of masculinity. The links very commonly involve hierarchy and exclusion, in which one (or more) pattern of masculinity is socially dominant and other patterns are dishonoured or marginalised. The term 'hegemonic masculinity' is in use to name the socially dominant construction of masculinity in a hierarchical gender order. Contests for dominance or masculine honour among men are a common source of violence.

**Collectivity** Patterns of masculinity can be understood at the individual level, but it is important to recognise that they also exist at the level of social collectives. Masculinities can be institutionalised in organisations (e.g. armies, trades, bureaucracies) or informal groups (families, friendship networks), and expressed in shared cultural forms (myths and folklore, mass media, social stereotypes). The collective reality is well demonstrated in organisational ethnographies of schools and military organisations. This collective reality is an important reason why change in gender practice among men and boys is hard to start simply by persuasion. An individual man may be willing, but the institutional setting, or the peer group culture, pushes in the other direction.



American graffiti in Gansvoort Street, New York, 2007

\* Adapted from R.W. Connell, 'Masculinities, Power and the Epidemic: Messages of Social Research', p2-3, paper submitted for the symposium.





**Social learning** Masculinities and femininities are formed over long periods of life, under complex social influences. Much of the popular discussion of masculinity focuses on the influence of older men (especially fathers), but the research demonstrates that women too are deeply involved in this process – as mothers, relatives, friends, sexual partners, and workmates. The process of forming masculinity is often diffuse and almost unnoticed. But it can become highly organised and intensive, for instance in gender-segregated schools, military training, and gender-segregated sports.

**Complexity** When we look closely at the construction of masculinity, in case-by-case life history research or in conversation analysis, the internal complexities of gender become apparent. There are often contradictory emotional trends in the one person's life. There can be multiple gender positions in discourse among which a given person can shift. Contradictory demands may impinge on men, for instance to maintain their own prestige and to recognise women's rights. Men may have valuable capacities (for instance, to care for small children) but live in social circumstances that rarely call on these capacities. These complexities may produce flexibility in gender practices, but may also be sources of tension or even violence; some men have difficulty handling their dependence on women, when they also fear femininity and seek to reject it.

**Change** When the social construction of gender was first recognised, it began to be discussed in terms of 'sex roles' and 'norms'. This was a useful first step, but we now have to move beyond the idea of 'the male role'. A focus on compliance with norms misses the way that breaking rules may be the means of constructing masculinity, as shown by the literature of criminology. Gender relations are historically dynamic, and the complexity of masculinities indicates tensions that can lead to change. There is now considerable evidence, from historical studies and survey research that constructions of masculinity do change over time. Economic change, war, generational turnover, and broader cultural shifts, may all be involved.





## Day 2 Learning from change

Raewyn Connell opened the second day with reflections on the importance of looking at the histories and dynamics of gender practices and belief systems. She noted that questions about men and masculinities are by no means new, nor are they optional. To understand historical trends and contemporary realities calls for an investigation of masculinities. Discourses and practices of masculinity are embedded in the history of global imperialism. European empires were constructed as gendered systems. The experience of empire changed the gender constructions and relations of the colonised and coloniser alike. The plantation and pastoralist economies imposed by European colonial powers on the continents of Africa and the Americas in the last five centuries transformed relations between women and men, and the gender beliefs that governed such relationships, in both the 'periphery' of the colonies as well as the 'metropole' of the colonial powers.

Raewyn stressed that gender orders are currently being reshaped by transnational corporations and the emergence of the US global security state. Transnational corporations, global capital markets, multinational agencies, superpower security forces, and international media are key features of the world we live in and are strongly gendered. Among the evidence are:

- transnational corporations' gender-segregated labour forces, for example in export processing zones
- the almost total dominance of men at the top levels of transnational corporation management, military control, the arms trade, and international organisations such as the World Bank
- the masculinisation of capital market trading floors and business media
- the sexualisation of women in global mass media
- the internationalisation of the sex trade
- the gender segregation of the international sports industries.



Ndeye Astou Diop and Aminata Toure

**Discourses and practices of masculinity are embedded in the history of global imperialism**







But these institutions need not reproduce exactly the gender patterns that existed anywhere before. There are certainly new large-scale gender divisions of labour, in *maquiladoras* (factories in free trade zones in Central America), as well as transnational mining and timber industries to name only two. There is some evidence of new patterns of managerial masculinity emerging in transnational business.

Raewyn concluded by emphasising that studying the historical and contemporary forces that continue to shape gender ideologies and their practices is a critical aspect of politicising work with men on masculinities. Such studies reveal not only the reality of gender change but also the necessity of working for such change not merely through personal change work with individual men, but also through political engagement with structures of male power. Subsequent sessions explored the nature of and relationship between such personal change and political engagement.

Barber's sign, Dakar







## Hard Talk: learning from practice

'Theory might not have yet caught up with practice'  
– Andrea Cornwall, IDS, UK

Starting with this premise, the symposium set out to revisit theories of masculinity through the analysis of practices that are changing men's gender identities and relations. The Hard Talk session, modelled on the BBC World Service programme of the same name, was intended with this in mind – to learn more about how people are grappling 'on the ground' with the challenges of politicising masculinity. Three pairs of participants were put to the challenge: Mbuyiselo Botha and Gary Barker, Annie George and Cheryl Overs, and Henry Armas and Patrick Welsh. Each person took turns at interviewing and being interviewed in front of the rest of the group. Below are four snapshots of their experiences.

### Reaching out to raise critical consciousness of men in poor areas

**Mbuyiselo Botha** We have an innovative and creative way of reaching men... we go to the *shebeens*... These places are very important because they are where issues of masculinity are entrenched. We first get buy-in from the *shebeen* owner... then we ask men if we can talk with them about what it means to be a man. You find various responses. In one incident, a young man said 'all women are witches'. Then I asked him, do you mean even your mother – she's one of those witches? He agreed, but this was captured on national television and when he arrived home his mother chucked him away!



Mbuyiselo Botha Reaching out to men in *shebeens* (local bars) in South Africa





**Gary Barker** Promoting critical consciousness among young men in Brazil

**Gary Barker** What is different [about Brazil] from South Africa is that there hasn't been an anti-apartheid movement. There is a lot of unquestioning of the social apartheid that exists... that's the backdrop for our work. What we are trying to do is encourage young men to ask themselves critical questions: to be aware of how these power imbalances affect their lives, to be aware of ways they can promote collective action about these power imbalances, to be aware of how this is part of the violence they practise against others... Promoting this critical consciousness is what our approaches have been trying to do – by designing approaches, strategies, campaigns and group education processes together with young people from the *favelas* so that they can add their own flavour...

## Promoting political consciousness of gender and masculinities

**Patrick Walsh** Community training workshops with men in Nicaragua



**Patrick Walsh** We have developed a community intervention strategy which works with men in the context of their communities. Men live in communities, they live with women, they live in families – they are not just isolated men. As part of that we run a training course for 20–25 men from the community, who ten times during the year have a one-day workshop to give them the space to reflect and analyse from their own perspective and experiences...

There is a thematic logic to the workshops, working initially on what it means to be men and women, and the characteristics of masculinity and femininity in Nicaraguan society; then the whole issue of what work we do, what work women do, the value that's given to that; moving into power and violence; then moving into sexuality... What we end up doing is promoting processes of personal development and growth for men starting from a gender analysis – enabling men to look at what are socially called 'feminine





attributes' and show that these are human characteristics, human values and human possibilities that we as men can also take on as part of our masculinity.

**Henry Armas** When the women's movement [in Peru] started to fight for voice in participatory spaces, the result was that while those men who conform more closely with 'ruling masculinities' retained their quota of power, men who did not conform, particularly young men who have decided not to get married or have children, were excluded from these spaces – they were not in a woman's group, nor in the power space occupied by the ruling masculinities... At the end of the day, the community is losing out with these kinds of exclusions.



**Henry Armas** The exclusion of non-conforming masculinities from participatory spaces in Peru

## Debating men, masculinities and female sex workers

**Cheryl Overs** Every time you hear someone ask 'why do women sell sex?' you should ask yourself 'why do men buy it?' – and the answer that they are just pigs that can't control themselves is not good enough. Nor is it good enough to say that women sell sex because they are poor. Poverty is responsible for the oversupply of sex workers and the poor pay and conditions that go with it, not the existence of commercial sex. Women sell sex in Malawi for the same reasons they do in Switzerland: because men buy sex.

The other point I would like to highlight is just how willing we are to believe the worst of men – the idea that there are women held captive in the suburban streets of the UK and guys are just raping them (because to have sex with a woman who is held captive is an act of rape) – I don't agree with this assumption and I don't think sex workers agree with it either. So the Swedish model of demonising and criminalising men as a way of addressing a social



**Cheryl Overs** Challenging assumptions about sex work and male clients



problem is not going to work... any tinkering that is done from the outside will end up punishing the female sex worker.



Annie George Sex workers and the state in India

**Annie George** On the one hand the state apparatus projects itself as the protector of women because it is impossible for the state to think that women opt to go into sex work. But in sex worker's interactions with men, the same men that act as their protectors – police, male workers in social welfare departments – also act as their violators...

I was at a highway 'hot spot' where sex workers sit to attract clients, sitting with one of the sex workers, and she noticed that some sex workers further down the highway were having what looked like an altercation with a group of men. She decided to get on her mobile phone and call the police to say that these sex workers were being harassed by local hooligans. But then someone told her that the men weren't hooligans, they were the police. My point is that sometimes the difference between hooligan and police is very narrow. It becomes very confusing for women to know who it is they are facing.

### Learning from the expertise in the room: discussing the papers

An exciting set of papers were submitted by participants in preparation for the symposium, reflecting the rich experience existing in the room. To create spaces to debate the questions and challenges raised by the papers, the organisers asked eight participants to work in pairs to draw out critical issues, questions or gaps emerging from a selection of the papers and to present these to the group. The discussants, and the papers they presented, are listed below. After hearing the commentaries, the authors joined with the discussants who had presented their papers for further conversations.

- **Emily Esplen and Paul Dover** presented papers by Robert Morrell, Annie George, Jerker Edström, Anders Ragnarsson, Fang Gang\* and Paul Dover

\* Submitted a paper but was unable to attend the symposium.



- **Margrethe Silberschmidt and Steven Robins** presented papers by Jill Lewis, Gary Barker, Jorge Lyra and Benedito Medrado, Pum Sophiny, Fang Gang\*, Margrethe Silberschmidt, and Steven Robins
- **Colette Harris and Chris Dolan** presented papers by Raewyn Connell, Mariana Vazquez, Patrick Welsh, Gareth Coats, Colette Harris, and Chris Dolan
- **Akshay Khanna and Chimaraoke Izugbara** presented papers by Bafana Khumalo and Dean Peacock, Giuseppe Campuzano\*, Radhika Chopra\*, Akshay Khanna, and Chimaraoke Izugbara.

### Forming 'affinity groups'

By now the group was becoming clearer about what needs to change in order to politicise work with men on gender and power, and the obstacles to achieving this. People also had a better sense of who in the room they had an affinity for and might want to work with to strategise in addressing these challenges. The next step was to articulate a vision for more politicised work with men on issues of gender and power, and to identify and debate the how. To take this forward, six 'affinity groups' were formed around key issues chosen by the participants. Participants were asked to write down a key theme or issue emerging from the first two days that they wanted to interrogate further. The organisers grouped the issues into six themes which became the basis for the affinity groups:

- new ways of theorising – conceptualisations, binary gender language and frameworks
- men's bodies and sexualities
- putting new thinking about masculinities and gender into practise at the local level
- institutions and policy
- social movements
- structural violence.



Street scene, Dakar

\* Submitted papers but were unable to attend the symposium.





## Days 3 and 4 Making change: strategies and opportunities; tools and alliances

### Affinity group work

Participants spent the morning of the third day in the affinity group they had formed on the previous day, engaged in impassioned debates and critical questioning around their chosen topics. Each group presented a flip-chart summary of their discussions to the rest of the participants – before enjoying a well-deserved afternoon off, haggling over trinkets in the markets of Dakar or strolling around the nearby Goree Island!

On the final day, the six affinity groups were merged into three larger clusters to facilitate shared thinking and the emergence of new perspectives:

- the **new ways of theorising** group joined with the **men's bodies and sexualities** group
- the **institutions and policy** group joined with the **structural violence** group
- the putting new thinking about masculinities and gender into **practice at the local level** group joined with the **movement-building** group.

Participants discussing how to problematise heteronormativity during SOSOTEC



The groups were tasked with identifying the tools and alliances needed to implement the strategies devised on day three, and the processes required to develop them. The rich thinking and possibilities that emerged from the affinity group discussions is explored in detail starting on page 31.



## What do I/we do now?

To concretise emerging ideas and stimulate new possibilities, participants took part in an energising final exercise – borrowed from Robert Chambers – a SOSOTEC/‘Self-organising Systems on the Edge of Chaos’!

The scene was set by creating chaos in the room – throwing down handfuls of marker pens, scattering cards and littering flip-charts. Participants were encouraged to take a flip-chart, write down something they really wanted to talk about, and to recruit themselves a discussion. Others wandered around the room, scribbling on charts or dipping into discussions and leaving a card with their views on as they passed by. It was a space for people to explore burning issues, tensions and challenges, ‘next steps’ and future alliances.

One particularly charged discussion was sparked by a question posed by a participant: is masturbation a form of infidelity? There was disagreement among the men present whether, in the event of a man finding his wife masturbating or her finding him masturbating, it would be a cause of betrayal, tantamount to cheating. The question gave rise to starkly different responses, ranging from ‘of course not, it’s her/his own body and sexuality’ to ‘I would feel I’d failed her – why would she need to pleasure herself if I was satisfying her properly?’ One participant even spoke of someone whose wife had divorced him after finding him masturbating.

The discussion unleashed some rich and delicate questions: What are the limits of individual autonomy? Do the institutions of heterosexuality police rather than enable sexual pleasure? What is the ‘sexual pact’ that couples are meant to enter into regarding their own and their shared sexuality? What happens to sexual freedoms within partnerships/marriage? Can men tolerate women’s sexual autonomy, or are they pulled to ‘be in charge’, to appropriate it? Does men’s freedom to ‘circulate’ sexually give heterosexual men license to pleasure that is not reciprocally sanctioned for women?



Lydia Saloukou Reine  
during SOSOTEC

Immersed in SOSOTEC





The SOSOTEC released tensions by providing space for disagreement and dispute, but in a light-hearted, informal way

Few conversations made so visible the real value of – and thirst for – spaces like this to explore ideas about sex, pleasure, intimacy, desire and power, and to interrogate that which is often taken for granted or assumed to be universal. (Thanks to Jill Lewis and Samia Rahim for their help with recollecting this rich dialogue.)

As the debate on masturbation raged on, a small group settled down to plan a series of joint events that would link some of the discussions in the symposium to wider networks engaged with work with men on violence. Another group sketched out ideas for a users' guide to men's bodies. In the middle of the floor, a debate took place on the question of whether men could be feminists, prompted by a series of cards left by passers-by. And as a large group gathered to explore issues of heteronormativity and their implications, a couple of people stood in another corner of the room deep in discussion about the relevance of long-established theories of gender to the work that needs to be done now to understand gender and power. The SOSOTEC released tensions by providing space for disagreement and dispute, but in a light-hearted, informal way; it also generated energy by allowing participants the freedom to cluster together to talk about the issues that were uppermost in their minds. The result was ideas and plans that would allow us to continue to build on the work we'd done together in the symposium.

### Final reflections, inspirations and appreciations

The symposium was brought to a close in a final plenary where participants shared their reflections and discussed ways forward.

'[I came away from the workshop with] a renewed sense of the urgency of working on masculinities and the need to develop strategies and methodologies that take the issue "beyond the personal", but which don't ignore or minimise the personal... [I also came away with an] affirmation of the need to stay rooted in pro-feminist thought and action' – Patrick Welsh, AHCV, Nicaragua



'This was one of the most stimulating meetings I have attended... I came away convinced more than ever that masculinities must be considered alongside femininities and other gendered identities. Also, in the current global anti-sex work climate, we need more evidence on the range of masculinities that operate in diverse contexts of paid sex, and to examine them *vis-à-vis* the masculinities that are implicit in international conventions and national laws that regulate sex work' – Annie George, Project Parivartan, India

'Dakar has great significance for South Africa. It was here, in the 1980s, that the ANC-in-exile, including President Thabo Mbeki, met with influential white politicians, journalists and academics to begin a process of imagining the parameters for negotiating a political settlement. For me, it was fantastic to be in Senegal with fellow South Africans, and participants from all over the world, knowing that we have a vibrantly democratic country. It was also very sobering to realise how much work needs to be done to address HIV and to realise the democratic project in terms of gender and sexual rights' – Steven Robins, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa



Street scene, Dakar

The next section explores the thinking and possibilities that emerged from the affinity group discussions.





### 3 New thinking, new possibilities

Based on the affinity group process (see page 26), the participants arrived at four key areas of discussion: new ways of theorising; male bodies and sexualities; shaping policies and transforming institutions; and mobilisation, activism and movement-building. This section seeks to capture the key ideas, excitements, tensions, possibilities and strategies that emerged from these conversations.

#### Beyond gender myths and binaries: the search for a new language

What does it mean to target the heterogeneous category of ‘men’ as a constituency for gender change? How can this constituency be programmatically and politically effective without reinforcing a binary understanding of gender? These were some of the questions we grappled with from the outset.

The need to move beyond generalised, binary stereotypes of female victims and male perpetrators was a recurring issue in discussions. Some participants argued that the image of men as perpetrators of wrongs, an image that pervades much of the ‘gender and development’ literature, inhibits men from accessing services and undermines men’s motivation to engage with gender equality initiatives, especially when they may themselves be marginalised and poor. It was also noted that the ‘gender and development’ paradigm’s frequent resort to simplistic gender dichotomies fails to account for the complex interactions between gender and other forms of inequality (based on class, ‘race’/ethnicity, age and sexuality) that produce differing experiences of power and powerlessness for different groups of men and women. Men in most societies enjoy the benefits of male privilege. But they also share with the women in their lives similar experiences of indignity and subordination as a result of







social and economic oppression. It is unsurprising then that they may not see themselves represented in the 'gender and development' discourse's image of the powerful male. This prompted Robert Morrell, among others, to ask:

'How do we talk to the millions of men who are grappling with issues of acute poverty and who are not interested in talking about gender? How does development grip onto their life circumstances?'

Margrethe Silberschmidt suggested one answer to these questions, in the following terms:

'I seriously doubt that poor, disempowered and frustrated men with no access to income-generating activities, who are not respected by their wives because of lack of financial support, who are blamed for their extramarital activities, and whose self-esteem and masculinity are at stake, would be interested in engaging in the struggle for gender justice, gender equality and broader social change... What would really interest them is getting access to income-generating activities that would enable them to provide for their families.'



Margrethe Silberschmidt and Robert Morrell

Whilst recognising this and many men's own social and economic disempowerment, others warned of the dangers of slipping into a language and thinking that regards women and men as equivalently vulnerable, or which describes men as 'worse off' than women. This is problematic because it draws a false equivalence which ignores the real differences in power and privilege experienced by women and men on the basis of gender, and glosses over men's accountability for the ways in which they choose to act out their privilege. So while we need to engage with poor men's realities and explore how these normative constructs of gender are playing out in contexts of economic marginalisation, we need to do this without positing men as the 'new victims'.





## Most societies ... subordinate the feminine to the masculine in a hierarchical relationship of domination

It was noted that this issue of false equivalence surfaces frequently in discussions of men's own experience of violence. Several points were made in this regard. The current gender-based violence paradigm tends to neglect the ways in which much of the violence that men experience at the hands of other men is based in dominant gender ideologies. Most societies are characterised by understandings and practices of gender that subordinate the feminine to the masculine in a hierarchical relationship of domination, in which men exercise power and control not only over women but also over other men in order to secure their own masculinity. Acts of physical, sexual and verbal abuse that men perpetrate against other men are then, in part, a gender practice of masculine domination that, by victimising the other male, also feminises him. In particular, the gender-based violence discourse says little about the men whose gender and sexual identities and practices expose them to violence and suffering because they are challenging the heteronormative gender order.

At the same time, however, it was emphasised that much of the energy behind claims that the gender 'stereotype' of male perpetrators ignores men's victimisation comes from a patriarchal political agenda that seeks to minimise male violence by exaggerating men's experience of violence at the hands of women. As is well documented, this violence is nothing like on the same scale as the many forms of violence experienced by women from men, not least their male partners. It was agreed that the challenge for the politicising masculinities agenda is not to fall into the trap of counterposing women's and men's experience and perpetration of violence. Rather it is to help illuminate the workings and functions of violence within the systems of oppression that organise our different societies, while holding accountable the individuals and institutions (mostly men and male-dominated) that are responsible for enacting this violence.





## Dispelling these binaries

It was clear from the Hard Talk session on the second day, and the diverse discussions that were prompted by it, that the challenge of politicising masculinities can only be met by moving beyond these binaries, and the myths that inform them. It was agreed that this required richer ethnographies of masculinities and femininities in the lives of different groups of women and men, at the same time as a clearer analysis of power that could contextualise these lives in relation to structures of oppression and opportunities for empowerment.

Dispelling the myths that inform such binaries requires that we spell out what shape myths take in people's lived realities. This raises fraught questions about the politics of voice and representation: Who can speak for whom or about whom? What are the issues of power inherent in talking on behalf of 'others'? How can we create spaces for marginalised voices to be heard?

Raewyn Connell emphasised the importance of gathering local information to inform action on masculinities and men's power. But the challenge of how to capture and articulate the diversity and complexity of masculinities, particularly at the policy level, remains. Participants discussed the dangers of acronyms and categorisation, and the tendency of policies to simplify and distort. Patrick Welsh argued that the label 'MSM' (men who have sex with men) reduces complex power relationships to an act of sexual penetration, concealing psychological, emotional and economic dimensions. Cheryl Overs remarked: 'I would rather be forgotten than turned into an acronym!'

But there are also advantages to these categorisations: money gets put behind the categories and things move. And once that starts happening, categories can become labels which people may want to appropriate for themselves in order to gain political space, resources and legitimacy. As Akshay Khanna pointed out, the label 'MSM' no longer represents only a pathologised risk group that exists in the discourse and practice of

How can we create  
spaces for  
marginalised voices to  
be heard?





## For some men, in some parts of the world it [MSM] has become a political identity

HIV/AIDS programming. For some men, in some parts of the world it has become a political identity, one around which to mobilise in order to contest the invisibility of homoerotic desire. Rather than deconstructing and dispensing with these categories, perhaps a more productive move is to foster the kind of gender and sexual pluralism that allows each and any of these categories to coexist – and use this to bring them into dialogue with one another.

### **Heteronormativity: an alternative articulating principle?**

How can we reframe engagement with questions of masculinities and power so that new alliances can be created, bringing work on masculinities into the heart of the struggle for social and gender justice?

A first step is to challenge stereotyped representations of women as objects of pity and men as perpetrators, and the politics of victimhood that goes with it. To do this we need new tools of thought to help us push beyond the limits of the concept of gender, as it has come to be used in much applied work on AIDS and development. Andrea Cornwall argued that the concept of gender is far too blunt an instrument with which to understand the complexity of men's and women's relationships and experiences. What we need, she argued, are conceptual tools that are at once more versatile and more nuanced, and that permit identifications and alliances that are not based only on identity. Queer theory, and the concept of heteronormativity in particular, offers such a set of tools.

One of the challenges for politicising masculinities is to find new ways of engaging with the feminist movement across a divide that is felt quite keenly in some contexts – with tensions over funding, over values and over turf. There are feminisms that are profoundly antagonistic to working with men. But there is in every feminism a concern with the negative effects of the normativities of existing gender and sexual orders. Feminists have long drawn attention to the oppressive dimensions of the institutions that exist to organise





heterosexuality, principally marriage, but also the double standards experienced by young and non-married women and men. The pressure to conform to social norms is a factor in creating the conditions for abusive relationships and for acts of violation of women's bodies by men. But it is also this pressure that makes it hard for young women to say 'yes' to pleasurable, consensual sex rather than 'no' to any sex at all, and for men who love men to do so openly instead of closeting themselves in marriage.

What attracted participants to the concept of heteronormativity was its potential as an articulating principle between a spectrum of different political struggles – for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights and recognition, for women's rights, for men against violence, for sexuality rights activists whose struggle is against repressive norms that deny people a right to love unless they conform to a set of very restrictive social norms. But while there was broad agreement that more attention needs to be paid to societal norms that valorise or prescribe certain behaviour on the part of men that can be harmful to those around them, as well as themselves, there was also some uncertainty about an approach that sought to destabilise those norms.

**'A critique of heteronormativity is a critique of societal norms. This means fundamentally questioning our own relationships. How far are people willing to go with this?' – Robert Morrell, School of Education Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**

What's left, some participants wondered, if the rug of accepted norms is pulled away? What about the investments that women as well as men have in what appears to be an inequitable *status quo* – investments that may have some quite substantial pay-offs? How far would it be possible to go in problematising heteronormativity given those investments – and what might a power analysis of those investments bring to creating space to question what is taken for granted?

**The pressure to conform to social norms [also] makes it hard for young women to say 'yes' to pleasurable, consensual sex**







Simon Mutonyi

There is, however, a more pressing challenge. The word ‘heteronormativity’ hardly rolls easily off the tongue. As Akshay Khanna pointed out, most people have no idea what it means. It sounds very theoretical. If it is to be tested out as a tool for thought, we need to find a jargon-free, bridge-building language with which to express it. There was a lot of enthusiasm for a follow-up meeting that would develop ways of expressing and extending the concept, and put it to work in politicising masculinities.

## Male bodies and sexualities

‘We need more discussion about men’s sexualities and bodies. There is a sense of the inevitability of the hydraulics of men’s sexuality which needs to be unpacked.’ This plea, made by Jill Lewis on the first day of the symposium, resonated powerfully with many participants and became a major focus of discussions throughout the four days.

### Pressure to conform and perform

Participants noted that across diverse cultures, manliness is associated with (hetero)sexual potency and prowess. This creates contradictory tensions and a dissonance between common ‘knowledge’/myths about male sexuality – stories about ‘other men’ and their sexual potency – and official and religious discourses around abstinence.

Simon Mutonyi described how in Zambia, stiffness of erections and quantity of semen are taken as measures of masculinity, leading to pressure on men to perform multiple ‘rounds’ of ejaculatory penetrative sex in order to live up to expectations of what it means to be a ‘real man’. It is so common as to be near universal that idealised images of masculinity create the expectation that men are ready and willing to have sex whenever the opportunity presents itself. In some contexts, men are valorised for having multiple sexual partners. In others, being unable to ‘perform’ so diminishes men’s sense of their own masculinity – and creates a potent fear of ‘losing their woman’ to





another man – that a vast and lucrative industry exists to supply men with herbal or pharmaceutical remedies to avert that possibility.

Jill Lewis also spoke of the social pressures on men to conform to stereotypes of the sexually voracious and accomplished heterosexual male: a source of intense anxiety for many men.

‘The ways men are perceived to behave, what they are assumed to need to embody, are shadowed awkwardly by the unsureness, the contradictions and the fears that underlie risk of failure to perform properly, to “get it right”,’ says Jill Lewis in her paper submitted for the symposium, ‘Careful Interventions: Masculinity and the Condom Challenge’ (p2).



Jill Lewis

Simon Mutonyi agreed, describing how these anxieties around ‘not being man enough’ can lead to feelings of ignorance or shame, and may inhibit men from talking about their fears or frustrations. In this context, asking for help or revealing a lack of knowledge about sex can be fraught with difficulty. This creates a disjuncture for young men, many of whom receive little information about sex but are under huge pressure to ‘get it right’.

The shame and humiliation that comes with not ‘getting it right’ creates a pervasive fear, which can create further sexual difficulties, such as impotence and premature ejaculation. As Jean-Louis Rodriguez pointed out, where men fail to get an erection or have a premature ejaculation, the woman who is witness to this becomes the bearer of the man’s ‘secret’ and gains power over him as a result. Cheryl Overs linked this to the stigma attached to sex workers, as those whose collective knowledge of the fragility of men’s sexual potency – and of how to deal with it – poses a profound threat to myths about men’s innate sexual power and prowess.

Fear of impotence poses real risks to consistent condom use, given the potential for humiliation, for being ‘soft’ – as well as the difficulty of





Participants noted that the prescription of heterosexuality denies a diversity of sexual identities, expressions and desires

getting a condom onto a faltering erection. Moreover, as Cheryl Overs pointed out, when there are problems with an erection condoms simply don't stay on – this issue is a huge gap in HIV prevention.

Anxieties around the need to conform to socially sanctioned norms governing sexuality may also inhibit men from exploring a diversity of pleasures or sexual desires beyond aggressive penetrative sex and ejaculation. In particular, participants noted that the prescription of heterosexuality denies a diversity of sexual identities, expressions and desires. Several participants expressed unease at the heterosexist orient of discussions around men's (and women's) bodies and sexualities, both in mainstream gender discourse and in the context of conversations at the symposium: what if the two bodies in question are male, they challenged?

Other participants raised questions about the centring of the male body in these discussions. They cautioned against an exclusive focus on 'the male', pointing to the fundamental interrelatedness of bodies and reiterating the importance of not rendering the female body invisible. Others critiqued the tendency to homogenise the male experience. What is needed, they implored, is a discussion not of 'men' as a discrete (heterosexual) category, but of a multiplicity of *gendered bodies*, and of the intimate connections *between* gendered bodies. Affinity group members therefore called for more attention to be given to questions of desire, sex, power and pleasure as they are expressed and experienced in the lives and interactions of real women and men.





## Creating spaces for honest communication

Creating spaces for men and women to talk about the contradictions and uncertainties they experience in relation to their bodies and sexualities was considered a priority by many participants. Similarly, enabling people to reflect and speak about how real bodies work, and to recognise and accept the variability and fallibility of men's and women's bodies, was seen as critical to deconstructing these myths. Patrick Welsh gave an example from his community training workshops with men in Nicaragua.

'We deliberately don't work on sexuality until we've created a bond within the group by working on the other issues. Quite often to get into the sexuality debate and to keep it on a personal level we turn off the lights, burn incense, put down flowers and play soft music, and take men back to their childhood and to their first sexual experience. They reflect upon it and then they share with the other men. Then we move into techniques where men can touch their own bodies and other men's bodies in an unthreatening and comforting way. So the sexuality issue is central but we don't work on it initially because it frightens men... in our experience they close up and run away if you start to work on that issue initially – you've got to nurture men into being able to talk honestly and authentically about their own sexuality...' – Patrick Welsh, Association of Men Against Violence (AHCV), Nicaragua

One idea that came out of these discussions was to produce a popular book that could be used in schools with boys and girls about how men's bodies work: 'Male Bodies for Dummies' – with its counterpart, of course, 'Female Bodies for Dummies'. The books could include examples of myths about men's and women's bodies from different parts of the world – not 'exotica', but real stories from real people about what is commonly believed to be true – such as myths associating female sexual pleasure with the size of a man's penis – and



Chris Dolan







the effects that these beliefs have on men and women. The idea would be not to counterpose ‘myth’ with ‘truth’, but to create spaces for people to explore their own beliefs about men’s and women’s bodies, and to learn about the beliefs that others hold.

### Putting emotions back into the picture

‘The whole discourse gets de-linked from emotions, it’s all about hydraulics’ – Chris Dolan, University of Makerere, Uganda

Valuable as it would be for men to have the resources to address pervasive and damaging myths about their bodies, discussion of sexuality needs to go beyond a focus on anatomy and physiology. Patrick Welsh criticised the tendency within development to reduce male sexuality to the body, and particularly to the act of penetration – a ‘genital sexuality’. He called for greater inclusion of emotional intelligence and reflexivity in work on sexuality and masculinity. The acronym ‘MSM’ – men who have sex with men – is revealing here. What about ‘MLM’, Chris Dolan asked – men who love men?

Assumptions about ‘genital sexuality’ as the main – and sometimes the only – form of ‘real’ sexual expression are very common. Men going to sex workers to buy sex are assumed to be buying this kind of sex and prevention strategies have focused on empowering sex workers to use condoms with their clients. But, Cheryl Overs said, from her experience of talking to sex workers around the world, a rough rule of thumb would be that for every ten interactions a sex worker has with a client, only around two clients are the kinds of clients imagined in HIV prevention discourses – men who want penetrative sex without a condom. Some don’t want penetrative sex at all for various reasons. Many go to sex workers to fulfil sexual fantasies that don’t carry HIV risk or have services that are not considered to be sex (such as penetration with a cigar). Many go for company and affection, sexual initiation or entertainment.

What about ‘MLM’,  
Chris Dolan asked –  
men who love men?







Recognising the many reasons why men visit sex workers can help shape HIV prevention strategies that go beyond a focus on condoms to widening a repertoire of non-penetrative sexual services and other services. One participant noted the invisibility of male sex workers or transgender people in the discourse on sex work: they have become subsumed under the label 'MSM'.

The possibility of men's desire for sex being diverted into a desire for something else provoked a discussion about what drives men to want and have sex. Patrick Welsh asked: How capable are we as men to read the signs of our own bodies? How often do we confuse loneliness or sadness for sexual urges? Do we use sex as an outlet because we are unable or prohibited from expressing other emotions? Is sex simply a release of tension? What else do men and women use sex for? Bafana Khumalo emphasised that sex can also be about men exerting their authority – 'giving it to her' or 'putting her in her place'. Asking these kinds of questions – Why do I want to have sex? Is it sex that I want? What am I looking for here? – open up important spaces for reflection, participants felt, and can be a stimulus to positive change.

### **Sexuality and development: how would we like to see this relationship changing?**

So, what do we want to see changing? Prevailing HIV/AIDS discourse on the feminisation of the epidemic presents women as victims and men as sexually voracious, violent and irresponsibly promiscuous predators. Male sexuality is actively associated with violence, fear, disease, risk and death. As well as being persistently negative, representations of male (and female) sexuality in AIDS discourses are also profoundly normative.

That men exist who violate and abuse women was not in question. But the problem with focusing only on the most negative dimensions of male sexuality is that we lose sight of the everyman in the midst of it all – men who are confused about the signals they get from their bodies and don't know how to read them, men who are scared of

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## Particular – often toxic – forms of masculinity are embedded within institutions

anyone knowing they find it difficult and painful to ‘perform’, men who would much prefer to have someone special who they can love but worry that if they don’t ‘screw around’ they will be mocked by their friends...

To recognise these men is not to deny the harm that they can do to others, or indeed themselves. But it does take us beyond a set of stereotyped assumptions about men’s sexual desires and behaviour, beyond a series of myths about how men’s bodies work, and beyond assumptions about gender relations between men and women where men always exercise privilege and prerogative and women are always subordinate. Opening up spaces to explore the taken-for-granted ideas that we all grow up with – and the feelings associated with them – can be incredibly powerful. The challenge is to recognise and work with the ways in which individual men and women navigate, contest and collude with prevailing structures of gender power and practice. In the current moral and political climate, these kinds of spaces become all the more important: for dialogue and discussion, to generate the evidence that can counter unhelpful orthodoxies in HIV prevention and other sexual and reproductive health and rights work, and to create new connections and build alliances for change.

## Shaping policies, transforming institutions

Institutions that reinforce and reproduce oppressive gender ideologies and related practices emerged as an important focus for discussion. In the affinity group discussions around institutional change and policy reform, Raewyn Connell spoke powerfully of the ways in which particular – often toxic – forms of masculinity are embedded within institutions: the military, other uniformed services, the education system, commercial sports, the media. Other participants spoke of the role that formal institutions play in reproducing ruling masculinity.





Nowhere is this more evident than in military institutions, with their embodiment and expression of male power and legitimised violence and the critical role they play in constructions of masculinity, especially in countries where some form of national service and conscription is in operation. Affinity group members noted that militaries have long been a target of HIV interventions and that such programmes are paying increasing attention to gender issues, given the close links between militarism, masculinity and sexual risk. Group members discussed the educational approaches most commonly used in these interventions, agreeing that such approaches were valuable in terms of change at the individual level but were of insufficient scale and intensity to make an impact on military cultures.

### Working with uniformed services

It was suggested that a promising direction might be to create spaces and processes for opening up discussion on the role of the military in modern societies, especially militaries in post-colonial societies, and seeking to reframe this role as one of protection and development rather than aggression and domination. Such discussions have begun to take place in some countries in Latin America, in the wake of the right-wing military dictatorships that ruled the region for much of the latter half of the twentieth century.

In this regard, however, it was agreed that attention could not simply be confined to the national level, given the role that the US military plays in shaping military spending and priorities in many parts of the world. Group members urged the importance of using human rights instruments and arguments to hold governments – and in particular the US government with its superpower status and influence – accountable for the actions of their military institutions, and to see this human rights work as an integral part of addressing the harmful links between militarism and masculinity.

The affinity group members talked about the ways that the UN continues, potentially, to serve as a moral exemplar, and thus the

**Military institutions  
play a critical role in  
constructions of  
masculinity**





## In hierarchical institutions, such as the police, institution-wide change really requires leadership and change from the top

importance of enforcing codes of conduct with regard to UN peacekeeping operations. It was noted that the UN has no direct jurisdiction over the military forces serving in such operations, but that it needed to use its influence with national governments to hold to account those who breach such codes of conduct, especially with regard to issues of sexual exploitation and violence. Group members also highlighted the importance of focusing on non-formal military formations, such as militias and paramilitary groups, especially with regard to the use of child soldiers. Demobilisation was identified as an important opportunity not only for developing skills to help former combatants' transition into civilian life, but also to help such ex-combatants heal from the socialisation into, and exposure to, the violence they have experienced.

Somewhat similar points were made with regard to institutional change within other uniformed services, notably the police. Similar issues with regard to cultures of violence and practices of domination within (mostly male) police services were noted, as were the limits of current responses, which remain mostly at the level of training (and the problems of this in terms of scale and intensity) and written policy (and the problems of this in terms of enforcement). There have been some interesting attempts at more in-depth work with police on issues of gender and violence, such as by the NGO Rozan in Pakistan, but these examples are noteworthy in being the exceptions that prove the rule. Elsewhere there have been attempts to challenge the oppressive masculinist culture of police services by putting the police into a different relationship with the community through community policing schemes. However, these initiatives have remained at the project level and have not been institutionalised. The group agreed that in hierarchical institutions, such as the police, institution-wide change really requires leadership and change from the top, but that in too many places there is a lack of political will for change. It was noted that in Brazil, for example, the pressure coming from many middle-class communities is not to reform a violent policing practice, but rather for the police to use whatever means necessary to protect the properties and possessions of these communities.







## Linking gender justice with economic justice

This discussion directed the group's attention to the links between gender, violence and economic conditions. Not only is the state violence of policing and prison systems directly related to the imperatives of maintaining social control in societies marked by high levels of economic inequality, so too is the system of transnational corporate globalisation strongly gendered. Group members noted the evidence of transnational corporations' gender-segregated labour forces, such as in export processing zones, and the dominance of men at the top levels of corporate management, military control, the arms trade, and international organisations such as the World Bank. It was also agreed that institutions don't simply reproduce pre-existing gender patterns; they also re-work patterns of masculinity and femininity, forging new identities. New patterns of managerial masculinity are emerging in transnational businesses, which are characterised by competitiveness and ruthlessness in achieving personal and corporate goals.

Interventions focusing on work with men on gender in the workplace have not come to grips with these 'macro' realities, but have remained stuck at the level of workplace-based education programmes. The affinity group members urged that much more attention be given to gender work at the management level, and that there is some evidence that focusing on middle management offers the possibility for change in organisational culture. The group felt that this kind of gender work needed to be part of a larger policy discussion about the gender division of labour in society, given that the aggressive masculinity exhibited by corporate managers in the long hours they devote to the pursuit of competitive advantage depends on the domestic labour of others (invariably women). Without this kind of discussion, little progress will be made in terms of life/work balance. There is some evidence from Scandinavia to suggest that parental leave policies that have sought to increase men's involvement in family life are compromised if men perceive that their career progression will be

**The affinity group members urged that much more attention be given to gender work at the management level**







damaged if they take the paternity leave to which they are entitled. In turn, this discussion implies a bigger conversation about the relationship between economic growth and social wellbeing, highlighting the need to shift away from exploitative pursuit of wealth.

### Working on key institutions in male socialisation

The critical role that educational institutions play in terms of gender socialisation was identified by the group as a key rationale for focusing on institutional change within the educational sector. The affinity group members urged that more attention be given to equipping and supporting teachers to teach and promote gender equity, and that this work needs to be backed up by enforcing policies against violence within school settings, not least the sexual violence of male teachers against female students. There are isolated 'safe schools' initiatives that are addressing this problem from which others can learn and which need to be scaled up.

The related domains of sports and entertainment industries were also identified as significant institutional sites in the production of harmful masculinities for men, especially young men. Sports have become a focus of some educational gender initiatives with young men, such as the Family Violence Prevention Fund's Coaching Boys into Men programme in the USA, which uses sports activities as an opportunity for engaging men and a place to talk about values and a source of positive 'role models'. The group noted that these useful initiatives also come up against the competitive logic of professional sports, and their associated multi-million dollar industries, whose imperative of success involves an emphasis on dominating one's opponent through training of the body to achieve primacy over other bodies, often through conflict. In other words, they are a celebration of some of the harmful norms of masculinity that gender work with men is trying to undo. The group agreed that a useful starting point would be at least to acknowledge this contradiction and generate discussion of it.

**Sports and entertainment industries were also identified as significant institutional sites in the production of harmful masculinities for men, especially young men**





The group also agreed that it was important to link this initiative of working with men through sports with work on the media and violence more generally. This is often seen as a critical site for intervention, especially around men and violence. But some group members urged that we ask more difficult questions about the connections between media representations of violence and real violence. For instance, in what ways does the former facilitate the latter (through modelling, desensitisation, etc.) and in what ways does media violence simply reflect or even mediate actual violence by providing a safe outlet? In this regard, it was suggested that news and current affairs shows, with their daily diet of violent images from real life, may do more to model violence for others, than fictionalised violence in TV shows and movies that provide a safe space for ‘fantasies of violence’ to be experienced. The group concluded by agreeing how important it was to build media literacy, for both women and men, so that people can make better sense of their media environment and its violence.

### Engaging with the political process

The affinity group members also spoke of the need to use language strategically in this work with institutions, for example to talk about ‘democratising gender relations’ rather than using the term ‘masculinities’, to allow institutions to get on board. Henry Armas noted the tendency to focus more on donors than formal politics, asking if we have lost faith in formal politics? It isn’t only about taking on the donors, he argued – we also need to discuss strategies for engaging with political parties.

Participants suggested that one logical starting point is to evaluate how existing government and donor policies implicitly or explicitly talk about men. What policies have already tried to engage men in achieving gender equality? What exists and where are the gaps? Are men changing their attitudes and behaviour as a result of these policies? Gary Barker referred to the Men and Gender Equality Policy





## Promoting men's involvement in sexual and reproductive health has been written into policies for the last 15 years so why haven't things changed?

Project, a joint initiative of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), based in the USA, and Instituto Promundo in Brazil, which will work initially in Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa.

The project will analyse public policies related to gender equality for their inclusion or engagement with men and boys and identify policy gaps and opportunities.\*

Other members of the group raised critical questions about whether formal government machineries have the capacity to transform gender relations on the ground. Annie George noted that promoting men's involvement in sexual and reproductive health has been written into policies for the last 15 years so why haven't things changed? One answer, she suggests, is that many people don't use formal health facilities or drop out of the formal education system. Policies do percolate down but this is a very slow process so we need to think outside the box. At the community level there are informal systems which have greater influence over people's lives – the family, religious institutions, informal work collectives, and so on. Annie suggested that more thinking needs to be done on how to engage with these informal institutions to bring about gender transformation.

The discussion concluded with agreement that it was critical to define a space for public action for public good that would allow for corrective social policy to be enacted over and above commercial and bureaucratic imperatives and obstacles (including redistributive tax policy and welfare policy).

\* For further information on the project see [www.icrw.org/ppt/men-and-boys/men-and-gender-equality-policy-project-gbarker.pdf](http://www.icrw.org/ppt/men-and-boys/men-and-gender-equality-policy-project-gbarker.pdf) or contact Gary Barker: [barkerpromundo@aol.com](mailto:barkerpromundo@aol.com)



## Community mobilisation, activism and movement building: towards a gender-just world

'In working with men for gender justice, it is important to organise men to work for political and institutional change – at Project Papai [in Brazil] we link up young men with social movements and campaigns to advocate for policy change. In terms of maintaining the engagement of young men in the Papai programme, we have found that a stipend is important, as well as a system for giving young men educational credits for their participation'

– Jorge Lyra, Instituto Papai, Brazil

Organisations working with men have overwhelmingly focused on changing the behaviour of individual men through workshops, trainings and community education programmes. By contrast, mobilising men to engage in broader struggles for social and gender justice is often left off the agenda. What would work with men look like if we took seriously issues of social mobilisation, participants asked?

Many felt that engaging men in rights-based activism and community mobilisation around issues of social and gender justice is an important strategy in efforts to move beyond the personal and catalyse broader social change. Participants argued that social mobilisation and political action can reach large constituencies of people and enable an engagement with structural factors often neglected in work on gender and men, such as structural unemployment. Mobilisation can also be critical in terms of putting pressure on governments to take action to challenge gender inequities and injustices. Unless watchdog mechanisms are in place, there is a risk of ending up with beautiful policies on paper which simply don't translate in practice. This was a concern for several participants, who argued that holding decision-makers accountable for existing policy commitments and legislation on gender equality is





## Simelela Rape Crisis Centre [is] a powerful example of the potential of social mobilisation to bring about change

critical in terms of putting pressure on governments to deliver. This requires men to be active citizens in their support for gender equality.

Dean Peacock, a powerful advocate of the need for rights literacy and active citizenship, gave the example of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa. In response to the rape and murder of TAC member Lorna Mlofana in 2003, TAC mobilised its membership, including Positive Women United and Positive Men United (POMU – two structures for men and women that encourage reflection and ultimately action on addressing gender inequalities), to secure evidence, pressurise the police to take action, oppose bail applications, and mobilise large demonstrations – until ultimately the perpetrators were convicted. On the anniversary of Lorna's death, TAC organised a rally at which a petition was handed to the Department of Health demanding the establishment of a full service rape crisis centre in Khayelitsha, the settlement where Lorna was killed. In response, the Simelela Rape Crisis Centre was established and provides previously unavailable counselling and post-exposure prophylaxis to rape survivors.\* This was a powerful example of the potential of social mobilisation to bring about change – and of the necessity to engage with this kind of political action in our work with men.

### Strategies for action: opportunities and challenges

What are the practical strategies needed to promote men's greater mobilisation around structural inequities and injustices? A clear imperative emerged from the discussions: the need to re-orient and politicise existing work with men on gender from workshops and trainings to organising men for social change. This would entail:

- consciousness-raising on structural issues
- mobilising men to campaign for changes in government policy, the legal justice system, and corporate practice
- capacity-building for men as activists, and
- training, including on partnership building and on the functioning of social movements.

\* This example is adapted from Peacock, D., Khumalo, B. and McNab, E. (2006) 'Men and gender activism in South Africa: observations, critique and recommendations for the future', *Agenda* 9, [www.agenda.org.za/content/view/1679/](http://www.agenda.org.za/content/view/1679/)





‘Papai works as part of a coalition of men’s groups on a range of campaigns and advocacy initiatives. We also link up with women’s rights organisations and other social justice movements – we believe it is very important not to create a separate men’s movement’  
– Jorge Lyra, Instituto Papai, Brazil

Identifying common agendas for collaborative work was seen as an important starting point, for example the link between economic justice and gender justice. Participating in progressive political spaces was also regarded as key in terms of forging alliances, promoting dialogue between movements and building solidarity. Spaces for fostering dialogue and solidarity include:

- **World and Regional Social Forums**
- **Association of Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) International Forums** – the 11th AWID International Forum is to be held in Cape Town in November 2008 on the theme of ‘the power of movements’
- **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**, New York. The February/March 2008 session focuses on ‘financing for gender equality’; the February/March 2009 session will focus on engaging men in caring for people living with HIV and AIDS
- **International Aids Conference** – AIDS 2008 is to be held in Mexico City, 3–8 August 2008, on the theme of ‘Universal Action Now’
- **International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA)** – to be held in Dakar, Senegal, 8–11 December 2008
- **Men Engage Global Conference** ‘Going to Scale: Engaging Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality’ – to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 29 March–3 April 2009.



Jorge Lyra

Participants emphasised that working in collaboration requires being explicit about our values and principles as a foundation for collaboration, and being prepared to challenge others on patriarchal practice. There was concern about the militancy of some social





**It is therefore important to work with men in existing social movements to take on gender equality and social justice in their work**

movements and of the patriarchal implications this can have for the way decisions are made and how the work is understood. According to Mbuyiselo Botha, many men in civic organisations are simply not ready to give away their privileges and benefits. In South Africa, for example, there are efforts to bring this work with men into the trade union movement, through the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). While this offers great potential for reaching large numbers of men, there are many challenges in terms of sexism and homophobia within the union movement. It is therefore important to work with men in existing social movements to take on gender equality and social justice in their work – both externally and internally – by challenging sexism and homophobia within movements and promoting leadership of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) people.





## 4 Where to now?

‘This was a very inspirational workshop, the diversity of participants and ideas paves the ground for a future broad base collaboration to advance the work on boys and men’ – Aminata Toure, UNFPA, USA

To try to capture and sustain the considerable momentum created by the symposium, IDS is producing a set of outputs, appropriately diverse and targeted to the needs of a range of audiences engaged with issues of men, gender and power. Planned IDS outputs are:

- *Politicising Masculinities: Beyond the Personal* – a book edited by Andrea Cornwall, Jerker Edström and Alan Greig, containing chapters by participants at the symposium
- All papers written for the symposium will be summarised and available online from Siyanda ([www.siyanda.org](http://www.siyanda.org)), an online gender and development database hosted by BRIDGE at IDS. The papers will be circulated to a diverse audience of gender and non-gender specialists through a Siyanda monthly email update
- A briefing paper on men, HIV and sexual health and rights, pulling together the lessons and key questions from the symposium plus additional review and literature references with project examples
- *IDS Policy Briefing: ‘Men, HIV, sexual health and rights’* – this four-page brief will highlight key issues and priorities for policymakers which have emerged from the symposium
- A special issue of the Eldis *HIV/AIDS Reporter* on the subject of men and HIV, to be posted on the Eldis HIV and AIDS Resource Guide ([www.eldis.org/hiv aids](http://www.eldis.org/hiv aids)). The guide provides coverage of the key issues by bringing together and synthesising research and experience from diverse sources in order to inform debates





- *Briefing Paper: Masculinities, Gender and Development* – similar to men and HIV (above), but more broadly focused on gender and development
- *IDS Policy Briefing: ‘Masculinities, gender and development’* – a similar theme of men and HIV (above), but more broadly focused on gender.

Several exciting possibilities for other future activities and resources were proposed by the symposium participants:

- A follow-up meeting to develop ways of expressing and extending the concept of heteronormativity
- ‘Male Bodies for Dummies’ and ‘Female Bodies for Dummies’ – popular books that could be used in schools with boys and girls about how their bodies work (see page 40)
- A resource pack bringing together existing activist tools and identifying current strategies for mobilising men for gender justice, and mapping out the actors already engaged in this work
- A concept paper making the case for the need to re-orient and politicise existing work with men on gender from workshops and trainings to organising men for social change – this would be particularly useful for funding purposes.





Above all, people left the symposium with a sense of renewed possibility and a determination to bring about change. New alliances and friendships had been forged, and plans for participants to get together again were already being hatched – with the 11th AWID International Forum in Cape Town, the International AIDS Conference in Mexico City and the Men Engage Conference in Rio all offering exciting opportunities to reunite and collaborate. As Mbuyiselo Botha commented so powerfully on the last afternoon of the symposium:

**‘Hearing about other men doing the work you do reconfirms your own commitment... it brings fire and passion back and the struggle continues’.**



What does it take to re-orient and politicise existing work with men on gender? Beyond essentialist understandings of women and men and binary concepts of gender, what other ways of thinking and doing gender are needed in order to truly transform oppressive gender orders? How can we re-frame our engagement with questions of masculinities and power so that new alliances can be created – bringing work on masculinities into the heart of movements for social and gender justice?

These are just some of the pressing questions that were grappled with in Dakar, Senegal, in October 2007, where a diverse mix of people came together: unconventional academics, progressive policymakers, reflective practitioners and activists. It was a unique gathering and offered a unique opportunity – to inform and inspire a greater engagement by men in the struggle for gender equality and broader social change. This publication captures some of the new thinking, possibilities, challenges and inspirations that emerged from conversations in Dakar.

‘The spirit of the meeting [was] of a sense of ascendant possibility and vibrancy against phenomenal odds’ – Jill Lewis, Hampshire College, Amherst, USA

‘Hearing about other men doing the work you do reconfirms your own commitment ... it brings fire and passion back and the struggle continues’ – Mbuyiselo Botha, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa