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Are You Man Enough? A Look at the Attitudes of Young Male Professionals on Notions of Masculinity and Male Gender Norms in Modern India

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A LOOK AT THE ATTITUDES OF YOUNG MALE PROFESSIONALS ON NOTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND MALE GENDER NORMS IN MODERN INDIA

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Abstract.

Indian society has traditionally adhered to very strict gender roles and norms that dictate the appropriate behaviors and attitudes of men and women in the private and public sphere. In the advent of a rapid urbanization and globalization, these rigid notions of appropriate masculine and feminine behaviors are changing in large metropolitan cities of India. This study explores the attitudes of young Indian male professionals regarding masculinity and masculine gendered norms in Bangalore, the epitome of metropolitan and modern India. Being a man is hinged to the notion of being the head of the family, and the appropriate traits to fulfill this role are being independent, being in control of one's emotions and being able to solve a problem without seeking help from others. When it comes to successful and career-oriented women, there is an intellectual acceptance of women's advancement but a lack of emotional acceptance among men; men are still resistant to having partners who earn more or are more successful than them. Patriarchal norms that stem from this notion of the man being the head of the family still dictate the expectations in marriage to be male-centric and male focused. This study calls for a redefinition of the 'head of the family' as a rigidly masculine ideal, so as to be more inclusive of the other half of gender.

Introduction

Family is one of the most important aspects of social life in Indian society. With the exception of some matriarchal societies in certain regions such as Kerala and parts of East India, India is by and large patriarchal, where the male is the head of the family and is responsible for the overall wellbeing of his family members. As with many other patriarchal societies in the world, there is a strict division between the roles and responsibilities that men and women have within the four walls of the home[1]. While the male's responsibility as a husband and father is to ensure that his family's financial and living needs are met, the woman's role is to support the male, by ensuring that things are running smoothly within the home: this involves managing household chores, taking care of the children and ensuring that her husband's needs are met[2]. This gendered division of labor has long been part and parcel of Indian family life and has created separate and distinct spheres for men and women. Men as breadwinners live and navigate freely within the public sphere, which women are not encouraged to participate in, restricting women to the private sphere of the home.

Nonetheless, this has been changing rapidly in the last few decades. With the advent twin processes of rapid economic liberalization and globalization, these traditional gender roles are changing, especially in urban centers and metropolitan cities in India. Along with these processes come changing social values, in which we are seeing more women becoming educated and are forming part of the formal workforce[3]. Increasingly the urban middle-class is expanding, and with that, lifestyles in the metropolitans are being aligned to that of the modern global culture[4]. More young, highly-educated, English-speaking Indian professionals from the middles classes are embracing the new global culture characterized by consumerist materialism, individualism and independence[5].

What is interesting is the effect of this process on what it means to be a woman presently in this section of society. Female presence in the public sphere is part of daily life; young women are encouraged and even expected to pursue an education and to have a working life outside the home[6]. Through being employed, more and more women now have

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[1] Kandiyoti, 1988
[2] Kandiyoti, 1988
[3] Society for Human Resource Management, 2009
[4] Derné, 1994
[5] Thapan, 2001; Lal, Gupta and Mukherjee, 2007
[6] Thapan, 2001, p. 360

the same financial independence as their male counterparts, and this translates to women sharing the responsibility of financially providing for the family with her husband[7]. Nowadays, the high cost of living in big cities has made double income households in big cities not only a norm, but also a necessity. Thus the traditional and homely Indian woman of a few decades ago is now transforming into one of "substance": she represents the modernity that is embodied by her education and presence in the public sphere of her workplace, yet this modernity is simultaneously balanced by her allegiance to the culture and traditions of her family[8]. This is what Radhakrishnan terms "respectable femininity", a new sort of femininity that is being constructed by the growing group of urban middle-class and working Indian women, which is constituted by a woman's ability to draw the fine line and maintain a healthy balance between work and family life. A woman who is able to keep her job and concurrently uphold the norms of the family is seen as the ideal role model, for she best enacts this respectable femininity[9].

This is a big step in the positive direction for women's empowerment in a society that has traditionally been infamous for child marriages, female infanticide and male-child preference. However, the question that arises is, how are these changes, where women are more empowered and visible in spheres that have traditionally belonged to men, affecting men? With notions of femininity and gender roles becoming more flexible, this is definitely having an effect on gender relations; how women relate to men and vise versa. As the question of what it means to be a woman in urban India is being re-envisioned, the notions of what it means to be a man must be changing in society too. In fact, a few studies have been done on understanding men's response and reaction to the effects of women's financial independence and empowerment within households. One such study was done in Bangalore, which looked at a change in the wife's employment (from unemployment to employment) and its correlation to domestic violence, and it found that a positive change in the wife's employment status did indeed lead to a 80% increase risk in domestic violence.

Such studies are focused on lower-income communities, where married women face more resistance from their husbands when it comes to them seeking employment outside the home. Part of this comes from the conviction that men have – that a woman's access to

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[7] Shukla and Kapoor, 1990
[8] Thapan, p. 360
[9] Radhakrishnan, 2009, p. 204

an independent income "would threaten to destabilize [the men's] authority"[10]. However, this group of men is not necessarily exposed to modern values of female independence as those who are in the middle and upper-middle classes. There has been a lack of academic research in understanding the changing notions of masculinities and male gender roles within the latter strata of society, though it wouldn't be unreasonable to presume that these men would embrace and be more open to egalitarian ideals of gender roles. With the exposure they have to the modern workplace in foreign and western companies whose HR policies are more focused on gender diversity and equality initiatives[11], it is logical to deduce that these men would not have rigid notions of gender roles and identities.

Nonetheless, the lack of women in top leadership positions in organizations, which is known as the glass-ceiling phenomenon, seems to prove otherwise. Countless studies have found that there are still many barriers facing women in achieving leadership positions, and these include institutional barriers, societal prejudices that view women as having weak leadership skills, and the "Boys club" phenomenon where male managers seek others who are like them to be part of their team[12]. While the aforementioned reasons are external, there is a more insidious internal reason for why women are not well-represented in the highest ranks: women themselves voluntarily leave their career to take on full family responsibilities due to the work-family bind[13].

While these studies have revealed a lot about what are the influencing factors causing this phenomenon, I argue that these studies are missing out a key component of women's experiences, that is, their gendered relations to the men in their lives, as husbands, boyfriends, friends and colleagues. While we have a better understanding on the changes that women are undergoing, we don't understand enough what are men's attitudes on their own male gender roles and masculinity. For, as Jackson very succinctly said, "We need to understand male gender identities more satisfactorily in order to make sense of the relational contexts within which women live their lives…. Considering male subjectivities is central to understanding gender relations"[14]. A lot of these reports and studies were done to understand how we can improve women's situation in the workplace, however this is not a holistic approach to the question. It is important to remember, "women's well-being often

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[10] Kabeer, 2007, p.18
[11] Society for Human Resource Management, 2009
[12] Eagly and Carli, 2008
[13] Eagly and Carli, 2008
[14] Jackson, 2007, p. 90

cannot be improved without including men [in the conversation] because gender is relational"[15].

       This research paper hopes to balance our understanding of gender relations by seeking to explore the attitudes of young Indian male professionals from middle class and urban India, on their notions of masculinity and male gender roles. Specifically, I ask the questions: What does it mean to be a man in urban, middle class India? What sorts of meanings are associated with being manly among young and urban Indian men and how are these notions embraced, rejected or redefined? What are the societal expectations of Indian men and how are these expectations changing? By analyzing men's responses, I hope to understand not only from where these notions of masculinity come from, but also to understand how if at all, do these notions of masculinity contribute to and/or perpetuate gendered roles and distinctions between men and women.

Methodology

       This study was conducted in Bangalore, also known as the Silicon Valley of India. It is a hub not only for technological and industrial companies, but it is also where modernity and more Western notions of life are meeting and colliding with the more traditional India. It is a melting pot of sorts, attracting some of the most highly educated and skilled male and female professionals from all over the country, who are working in environments that are gender-friendly. Hence, it is not unreasonable to assume that more progressive and flexible ideals of gender roles are more prevalent in Bangalore compared to other parts of India. Nonetheless, I argue that it is more nuanced than that. It would be interesting to explore and understand the existing negotiations and tensions confronted by Indian men who work and live in a space that embodies the characteristics and ideologies of a globalized and liberal metropolitan, but is embedded in a larger context of traditional values, norms and paradigms that do not necessarily promote progressive and more flexible notions of masculinity and femininity.

       I conducted in-depth personal interviews with 12 men working in various IT and multi-national companies in Bangalore between the ages of 25-35 years. I came in touch with these men through the snowballing method of sampling; I approached individuals working in the diversity department of a few IT companies to put me in touch with potential

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15 Bannon and Correia, 2006, p. xviii

interviewees, whom after the interviews, put me in touch with more people. Four of these interviews were conducted in the respondents' work places, while the rest were conducted in one of the many local cafés that Bangalore has to offer. I found that having the interviews at a neutral place like a local café provided for a more comfortable space for these men to share their thoughts and opinions about the topic, as it felt more like an honest conversation and less like a work-related interview or meeting. Each interview took about 45 minutes to an hour, and I asked questions on these men's background and upbringing, their definitions on what it means to be a man in Indian society, the responsibilities and roles that men are socially expected to fulfill, their opinions on marriage and both men and women's expectations of each other in a marriage. Later, I conducted an all-female focus group discussion with 6 women between the ages of 25 and 35 on these same questions to get a general understanding of women's perspective on this topic. I also interacted with both men and women at a local café where many young professionals working with both local and foreign start-up companies meet on this issue. This served to triangulate the information that was given to me by the men I had interviewed.

The names of the men mentioned in this paper have all been changed to maintain anonymity. Five of the twelve men I interviewed were born and brought up in Bangalore; two came from the states of Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh respectively to work in Bangalore; and the rest were born and raised in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala but had left their hometown to pursue their education and were now based and working in Bangalore. All of them are from middle and upper middle class backgrounds. Two of these men are married, and the rest are single but do have plans to get married at some point in the future. I did not set rigid specifications of having an equal number of married and unmarried men for two reasons: 1) I was more interested in men's perspective on masculinities and male gender roles before marriage, to understand the mental paradigms that these men carry with them when they enter a gendered institution like marriage, which in the Indian context, has its own set of customs and norms, and 2) though an equal number of married and unmarried men would have been quantitatively ideal, I did not want to limit the availability of respondents given the short time frame of the project.

The Construction of Gendered Identities

<u>What does it mean to be a man or a woman, and what influences these constructions?</u>

'Man' and 'woman' are at once empty and overflowing categories. Empty because they have no ultimate, transcendent meaning. Overflowing because, even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative, denied or suppressed definitions

–Scott 1988[16]

The above quote wonderfully encapsulates the existing theories, discussions and debates surrounding gender, a term that tends to be a victim of common misconception. Gender is often misconstrued as being synonymous with sex. While sex is very much rooted to biology – that is, the binary division of individuals as male or female based on their biological features and characteristics – gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors and activities that are associated with the male or female body. From these socially constructed roles come notions of masculinity and femininity, which are essentially the "psychological behaviors and attitudes that are socially-deemed 'appropriate' and 'expected' of male and female bodies respectively"[17]. Men are expected to embody masculine characteristics, thus "masculinity", whereas women embody feminine attributes, "femininity"[18]. The Bem Sex Role Inventory Short Form (BSRISF) highlights the major traits that are generally categorized and associated with either gender. Traits that are masculine include being independent, assertive, dominant, willing to take risks, and aggressive. Conversely, the feminine characteristics include being affectionate, sympathetic, sensitive, understanding, tender, and nurturing[19].

A site where these gendered behaviors and attitudes are shaped and crystallized is the family, especially in the traditional Indian family structure. India has a "patrifocal family structure and ideology" within which there is the centrality of men and a restriction of women to the private sphere[20]. Within the familial institution, family honor, joint-family living, arranged marriage, and restrictions on women's mobility outside the home are given importance. This relationship between men and women in the traditional Indian family institution represents the larger relationship between the sexes in society. This relationship is

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16 Alsop, Fitzsimons, Lennon, 2002, p. 2
17 Alsop, Fitzimons, Lennon, p. 20
18 Alsop, Fitzsimons, Lennon, p. 19
19 Agrawal and Singh, 2007, p. 136
20 Derné, 1994, p. 204

what Bryson, in her article *Patriarchy – Too Useful to Lose,* calls the 'patriarchal power', a structure that "is maintained through socialization, beginning with the family and reinforced in other realms and spheres of society through education, religion and literature"[21], where men's control over the family legitimizes the subordination of women in other facets of social life. One example is the fundamental basis of the gendered division of labor in India, which is based on an ideology that is hinged on what is appropriate female behavior, which more than anything, "emphasizes modesty, obedience, self-sacrifice and attachment to the home"[22]. Religion is one of the tools used to maintain this status quo – the interpretation of Hindu ideology is such that it encourages the limited mobility of women outside the home and restricts their interactions with powerful men within the home, reinforcing women's subordinate position in India[23]. Therefore women in their daily life have to bargain and strategize within a system, a process that Kandiyoti calls the 'patriarchal bargain' where qualities associated with women and femininity are less rewarded, while qualities that are traditionally associated with men and masculinity are merited and privileged[24].

This binary framework not only pits masculinity as an antithesis to femininity and vise versa, but they are treated as rigid and inflexible categories that are mutually exclusive. What is also troublesome about this, Bryson argues, is that these categories are perceived as normal and natural; that masculine and feminine abilities are naturally inherent and inbuilt in men and women respectively[25]. Almost all the men I interviewed held this view of the world. When explaining the differences between what men and women can or cannot do, one of the men Kunal[26], age 26, explained that women are better at certain things and men at others. However, he emphasized that men are worse at some things such as "maintaining the family with the proper emotions" compared to women. Men, unlike women, are unable handle the 'emotional part'. "This thing (being emotionally sensitive) has not been taught to girls separately, but *they are just better at these things*" (emphasis mine). He gave a range of examples, from simple gestures of showing affection such as remembering friends' birthdays to bigger acts such as taking time off from work and putting more effort to spend time when a family member who is visiting. A woman "will take more effort to take leave [from work]

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[21] Bryson, 1999, p. 311
[22] Bryson, 1999, p. 311
[23] Derné, p. 205
[24] Kandiyoti, 1988
[25] Bryson, 1999, p. 314
[26] Not his real name. All names have been changed in this study to maintain anonymity

than the guy. Not because she is forced to, or asked to, but she does it by herself, she just wants to take care of these people". This "feeling" is there in guys, but is not to the same extent as it is in women. Another example that was given was when it came to handling kids. Women are not taught to handle kids until they themselves have them; yet when a couple has their first child, the woman seems to know how to handle the baby better than the man. "These things, women are just better at than men", he concludes.

That these traits are natural or inherent or inbuilt in men and women are exactly the notions that gender studies aims to dispel. Instead, gender studies argues that these categories are a result of social construction, determined and shaped by the local social structures and institutions which distinguish spheres for men and women, in which they perform roles that are specific to their gender[27]. Nonetheless, such myths are extremely difficult to challenge in a society like India, where the distinction between the sexes are observed and internalized from a very early age. Almost all of the men interviewed agreed that they first noticed the difference between girls and boys in the different treatment their female friends received at childhood. At school, boys and girls were separated and made to sit in different rows. When it came to playtime in the evenings in the local neighborhood, girls would be called back home earlier than the boys and were sometimes discouraged by the adults from playing games with a lot of physical contact with the boys. Though the adults around them did not consciously highlight these differences, these men (as young boys) knew that there was something different about girls, as many more conditions were put upon them and they would go by different "rules". As Jay, aged 29, very succinctly put it, "There were always things that would emphasize that she [referring to his female friends] is in some way different from me. It wasn't anything conscious or open, but I could get some sense that she was different from me and my other guy friend".

More important than the sparse interactions a boy child has with his female friends during playtime are the behaviors and attitudes of his parents, which he observes, learns and imitates from a very young age. As the basic and fundamental form of social organization, the family is a formative space that shapes a person's understanding of themselves, their relation to others and the world around them. It is the site where a lot of social conditioning takes place, where gendered work, customs, and practices are enacted and transmitted from one generation (parents) to the other (their children). However, with regards to the middle

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[27] Alsop, Fitzsimons, Lennon, p. 65

and upper-middle classes and highly educated Indian population, there is a paradigm shift, resulting in a change in the relationship between men and women both in the private and public sphere, which has led to very palpable transformations in the family structure of these groups"[28] This shift can be seen in families where these mainstream norms of gendered division of responsibilities are subverted. Though a few decades ago these women were in the minority of the upper and educated strata of urban Indian society, there were women who were highly educated with careers while being married with children. A few men I interviewed had strong mother figures growing up; mothers who were independent, well educated and had very important careers, something that was not the norm back when these men were growing up. It was having a mother like this that influenced their more positive view of women.

One example is Jay, who grew up with a sense of equality, which he attributes to his parents' relationship and the very strong female figure he has, which is his mother. His mother was very successful; the only female sexologist in the whole state of Karnataka at the time, and though she had a career that she pursued throughout her life, she still had a big presence in his life growing up. His father played a big role in his upbringing and would take on household chores that many men, at that time, would not take on such as buying groceries. Another is Surya, age 29, whose mother started her own business selling leather goods. As someone who was a serious tennis player for the state up and till his twenties, he grew up surrounded by women whom played tennis with him and therefore he "didn't notice any bias on what a woman should or shouldn't do, compared to a man". Being surrounded by women who did not necessarily conform to the traditional feminine roles has, according to these men, resulted in them viewing gender not in the limited sense as is represented in the typical and traditional Indian family structure.

Thus the family, on the one hand, is the social space from which a society's values fundamentally originate. Yet, it is simultaneously also a location where the larger cultural discourses, beliefs and norms that exist at the larger societal level are manifested. It is not only manifested in the family structure, but the local cultures and environments in which a family is embedded play an influential role in shaping the values imbibed and inculcated into the children. India's case is again very interesting, for India being an extremely diverse union of various states and cultures, values and norms change from region to region. These social

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[28] Dasgupta and Lal, 2007, p. 15

norms, structures and socially accepted meanings are what Foucault terms 'discourses', which are the means by which reality is dictated and identities constructed. This includes language, images, narratives, stories, and they are also the everyday actions that we do, such as social practices, routines and traditions and they all carry meaning, though the meanings themselves vary from context to context[29]. In *Theorizing Gender,* Alsop et. al argue that it is these macro-level discourses, such as language and culture, within which the family and the institution of marriage are embedded are what ultimately shape gender[30]. The meanings that a culture or society associates with masculinity and femininity inevitably determine what it means to be a man or a woman for the individuals within that society. Hence in gender construction, it is not just the biological difference between a male and female that is at work; both societal structures and institutions and the meanings that are attached to these categories work in tandem in the process of gender construction.

The differences in perspectives due to the larger societal norms were evident in the men's responses. Arjun, 26 years, explains this in comparing the women in the city of Cochin, Kerala where he grew up to the women in Bangalore, to which he says there is a "clear cut difference" between the women in the two cities. The difference however, has less to do with the women themselves and instead "has more to do with the society". He says,

> "In Cochin, the general people over there…. People over here [in Bangalore] don't care. In Cochin people keep staring at you. Even though a girl may want to dress the way she wants, or behave the way she wants, she may not be able to because of the society. Here in Bangalore, I can speak to a girl much freely than I was in Cochin. I used to think twice there before speaking to a girl. I couldn't be free. I had to think about what they would think about me. There's this fear, that you can't be open".

This sentiment was shared by the other three men from Kerala I interviewed, wherein the appropriate and acceptable female behavior is associated with being modest and having limited interactions with males especially in public, and the corresponding appropriate male behavior is to respect the lines drawn by society between men and women. These lines are

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[29] Alsop, Fitzsimons, Lennon, p. 64-66
[30] Alsop, Fitzsimons, Lennon, p. 65

less apparent, if not hardly there, in a place like Bangalore, and it is this freedom and lack of socially-imposed inhibitions over one's behavior and attitude that makes Bangalore one of the most attractive places to live in India for young people.

Bangalore – Then and Now

However, Bangalore was not always like this. The Bangalore of twenty years ago looked very different from the Bangalore of today. Then, it was known as the Garden City, or the "Pensioner's Paradise". In the 1980s, Bangalore experienced a huge real estate boom, attracting many wealthy individuals to invest in land for the creation of multi-storey apartment blocks[31]. With the national liberalization of the Indian economy from the year 1990 onwards, Bangalore saw an influx in new up-market and international stores and brands, banks, and fast food chains[32]. This increase in investment into Bangalore changed in type towards the end of the 90s, with the rapid growth of the information technology industry, alongside with a high number of Indian and non-resident Indian professionals both in India and in the Silicon Valley in the USA[33]. With employment prospects dropping in another industries, the software and IT industries gained a strong momentum in Bangalore. Now, Bangalore with a population of 9.5 milion is home to not just the elderly elite from the senior bureaucracy from the days of the Pensioners Paradise, but is also home to many highly educated young professionals working in these software and IT industries[34].

Bangalore's name is now internationally known as a beacon that represents India's rapid economic growth and its expertise in the IT and software industry. As a city, it is known to be one of the most progressive, modern and culturally liberal cities in India, making it one of the best places to live for young people. Bangalore is a space that has undergone rapid changes in the last decade and as a city itself it embodies the changing values, from traditional and conservative to more modern and liberal, that is taking place in modern India as a result of increased globalization and exposure to Western types of lifestyles. It is in this context that the many of the customs, norms, traditions and the values that come with it are eroding. One such custom is that of the traditional version of the joint, multigenerational and intimate family, which reflects a set of values: that of strong kinship,

[31] Benjamin, 2000, p. 36
[32] Benjamin, p. 36
[33] Benjamin, p. 37
[34] Benjamin, p. 37

fellow feeling, supportive interdependence, patriarchy, crowded hearths, plentiful time and a moral-spiritual order[35].

Unsurprisingly, this version of the family unit is rapidly changing in Indian society, especially in the urban, upper-class and highly educated communities, which is seeing a change in the relationship between men and women both in the private and public sphere. This consequently has led to identifiable transformations in the family structure of these groups[36]. "People shy away from the joint family nowadays, not realizing how enriching it can be for the children to live in an intergenerational setting with lots of people from whom the child will learn and grow from", says Surya, age 29, who was the only one from all my interviewees who wanted to live in a joint family setting when he gets married. Joint families are less appealing as they not only bring to mind the image of the "oppressive mother-in-law" who is out to get her daughter-in-law, but also due to other forces acting together: women becoming more financially independent and therefore marrying later and wish to live in a nuclear family; parents among elite classes have children who work abroad; and westernization and modernization, which has brought to India new ideologies and social forms: individualism, materialism, consumerism, gendered and aged egalitarianism[37].

It is argued that in such a metropolitan, modern and melting pot of a city that is Bangalore, the traditionally held notions of gendered identities are changing the most, and as a result of this change, are most flexible. In other words, you would think that among the English-speaking, middle-class, highly-educated, Gen Y group of Indian men, have more flexible notions of masculinity and male gender norms, relative to the rest of the population. The next portion of the study narrows down on these men's thoughts, attitudes and perceptions over their own gendered identity as men and the meanings associated with it.

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35 Lamb, 2007, p. 83
36 Dasgupta, Lal, 2007, p. 15
37 Lamb, 2007, p. 83

Findings

Men's take on Masculinity – what does it mean to be a man?

What is masculinity? Masculinities are representations, behaviors and attitudes that are associated with and expected of male bodies. They are one half the gender script, with the other half being femininity. Our identities are created in an interaction process where we learn the ready-made gender scripts of the culture that we are in, imbibe them and simultaneously "attempt to modify these scripts to make them more palatable"[38]. For men this gender script involves these specific attitudes: "restrictive emotionality" (big boys don't cry); socialized control, power and competition (being a take charge man); restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior among men (not displaying vulnerability, particularly with another man); and obsession with achievement, work and success (self-worth that is measured according to title and income)"[39]. This is known as hegemonic masculinity, which is the dominant form of masculinity, "the basis on which men are critically judged and assessed"[40].

My interviews revealed that a man's identity in Indian society is hinged on his role and responsibility as the head of the family. It is a finding that is supported by Jackson's study, which found that manliness in India involves "supporting and providing for a family"[41], and a man's everyday behaviors, actions and attitudes are all a function of this role. My interviews reveal that being independent, being in control of one's emotions, and being able to handle and confront difficult situations independently are the most important traits that are associated with being a man. Having these traits are imperative for a man to be in charge in taking on family responsibilities, both within the family he grew up in and the family that he will have in the future. In this next section, I will look at these three attributes of what it means to be a man in depth, and analyze the implications for gender relations.

Masculinity as having Independence that is tied to Responsibility

A man is defined by his independence; this was one of the most important traits that characterizes a man, according to my respondents. This independence entails the freedom that men have to do certain things that women don't, which Bryson identifies as the general

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[38] Davis and Wagner, 2005, p. 32
[39] Davis and Wagner, 2005, p. 32
[40] Alsop, Fitzsimons, Lennon, p. 246
[41] Jackson, 2007, p. 99

independence that men are privileged to enjoy relative to women in a patriarchal society[42]. One example is men having less difficulty in being allowed to leave home and pursue their education abroad or in a city further away from the family. The men shared that Indian families are more ready to allow their sons to go but more reluctant when it comes to their daughters. One of the men, Arjun had left the country to pursue his studies for a few years, and he believes that if he were a woman, his parents would not have allowed their daughter to leave for another country, as they would've preferred her to be closer to them. The reason for this, he says, is 'society': "Society as such, allows for guys to be independent, and in fact, expects him to be independent. But, it is not favorable for a girl to be independent". A woman's independence is limited by the people around her, such as her parents and the people in her immediate community, and therefore for a woman "to do everything that a guy does is quite impossible". For, according to Arjun, "at every point, there is something that holds them [women] back, that does not let them do what a guy can do."

However, what makes a man 'a man' lies not in his ability to enjoy his independence, but in his ability *to be* or *to become* independent. While men's independence gives them the liberty and access to enjoy certain privileges that women don't, this independence does not necessarily grant a man the freedom to do as he pleases. In India, personal desires and actions are circumscribed and limited by the social bonds and ties that one has to one's family and larger community. Young people are expected to be "submissive and cooperative", therefore rendering individual autonomy subordinate to group cohesiveness, characterized by family unity and stability[43]. Thus *having* independence is one thing and *being* independent is another, and it the latter that a man's identity is hinged upon. For, it implies that one is in a position to be able to take on the responsibilities that one is due, which are essentially familial responsibilities. As Jay sums it up: "for guys, independence does not just mean being independent by yourself, but as a male, it means being able to support your parents". In Jay's particular case, he has never felt this expectation imposed upon him by his family: "It was never really told to me consciously by my parents, but I can definitely feel that this is the undercurrent theme for many men I know – they are always thinking about how they will continue to support the family".

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[42] Bryson, 1999
[43] Medora, Larson, Hortacsu, and Dave, 2002, p. 157

Thus, being independent for a man is essentially tied to being responsible to one's family and fulfilling one's familial responsibilities. Unsurprisingly, this notion stems from the traditional ideal of the male member as carrying the dual identity of being the head and the breadwinner, who is responsible for providing for his family. This is why Vivek age 30, says that, "there is more pressure on the guy than the girl to be in good financial status". Govin, age 33 who has been married for two years concurs: "A man must be financially independent. Because he has to start taking responsibilities of the family, and [at some point] he's going to have a family of his own, he is expected to start working and earning right after finishing college". This pressure of being financially independent very early on in life is also out of economic necessity. As Govin shares: "Lots of families in the middle class have financial problems, and that's why they send their sons right after college to start working".

Women on the other hand don't face this pressure as much as the men. From Govin's experience, he shares that "for women, even if they don't get a job it is okay, the parents will still support them". This is due to the nature and structure of the Indian family itself. When a woman gets married, she marries into her husband's family and becomes part of the husband's family. Her allegiance shifts to that of her husband's family. "Girls are not pushed to take up family responsibilities because the parents know over time she will get married and go off to another family. They will leave eventually to another family, so burden is on the son to maintain his own family", shares Vivek, referring to his sister who is working and will be married of soon.

From these men's responses, it seems that it is acceptable for daughters or the women of the family to not take on familial responsibilities of the financial nature. For, this is a role that falls on the shoulders of the son, as he is the one who will have to take care of his parents in their old age. Consequently for men, being unable to meet this responsibility results in the man being socially penalized by his family, peers and community:

> "For guys, they [friends, relatives] will keep teasing the guys, undermining their confidence and say things like, 'Oh you're a guy, what are you doing? You're still at home and not working...you're worthless!' and stuff like that. There is a stigma against guys who are staying at home and not doing anything."

As a 'guy' or a male of the house, those around him perceive him negatively when he doesn't fulfill the appropriate male gender script of supporting his family, especially after he has

completed his education and is of a certain age. His worth as a man is contingent upon his ability to be out of the home and make a living, and "staying at home and not doing anything" renders him worthless.

Being independent hence takes a very specific form for these men; it means being financially independent and no longer depending on one's parents to support oneself. In addition, one is expected to start shouldering the financial responsibilities from their fathers, who inevitably start retiring and become dependent on their own children, specifically the sons. In this sense, what it means to be a man is not very different from the traditional gender script of conservative India, where the man is in the public sphere, in search for a way to put food on his family's table. His ability to be independent and to appropriately carry out is responsibilities as a son – as the male figure of the family – determines how others perceive him, and consequently, influences how he sees his own self-worth as an Indian man.

Masculinity as having control over one's emotions

A man is also someone who is mentally and emotionally strong – he is someone who is in control of his emotions. Kunal says it part of the "Bro Code", which includes not talking to other men about one's emotions A man, according to Jay, "needs to be strong enough to handle situations without breaking down and falling apart emotionally". These men explained that 'being in control' of one's emotions meant not expressing one's emotions and becoming emotionally vulnerable to the people around him. Many of these men felt that even if there were a need to express certain emotions, such as sadness, disappointment and frustration, they would not share it with others, especially their male friends. Kunal complains, "Guys are jerks. You can never talk to these guys about emotional stuff".

In this sense, men are different from women because they do not express their emotions as much and are able to "keep their emotions more subdued" than a woman could. When asked why men don't share their emotions as freely as women, Arjun said:

> "Even if a boy tends to be emotional and shares his feelings openly, as he grows up, he knows that his peer group will tease him. As he grows older, society, or the people who are around him would make him feel bad for being expressive. Boys are such that, over the years it would not be a public display of emotions, because they know that it is not what they are supposed to do"

He explains this from a social constructionist perspective; men are not openly emotionally expressive due to his the social conditioning he is subjected to while growing up, through which he understands that this is something that "they are not supposed to do". However, he rationalizes this further and he immediately takes on the biological justification or the "it is nature" argument and says,

> "I think it is nature that we [men] are able to hold on [to our emotions] much more. It is not as easy for guys to cry or break down as girls. I know people who enter college who are very emotional, and we used to tease them. By the time they leave college, they are perfectly normal. We are certainly emotional, as men too. But we know how to keep our emotions a little more subdued than a girl would"

Men, who are initially 'naturally' more emotional than other men grow up learning from their interactions with their peers and others around them that this is not appropriate masculine behavior, and as Arjun says, by the time he leaves college, he becomes 'perfectly normal'.

This response and others like it show how men are socially conditioned to exhibit what Davis and Wagner call 'restrictive emotionality'[44], which includes not crying and not sharing one's emotions publicly. Often times, as exhibited by the contradictions in Arjun's response, men believe that this lack of emotional expression is part of men's "DNA" and is in their innate nature to be less emotionally sensitive and expressive than women, or that women are better at it than men. When asked about why is it so important for a man to be able to control his emotions, Vivek explained: "There is the expectation that men have to manage their emotions more than women – because, the typical head of the family is the man. The male is looked at whenever there is a problem. If he starts losing his emotions in life, the other family members will find it difficult to seek guidance from him". Women too draw on this image of the level-headed, emotionally strong man who is able to face situations and hardship when they imagine their future spouses, and thus reproduce in their own imaginings a male that fits this normative gender script. As Talbot and Quayle found in their

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[44] Davis and Wagner, 2005

study on South African women as active agents in the construction of masculinity, "masculinities are not maintained by men alone, as they draw on women as the other in the creation of their own identity as men"[45].

This notion of men and masculinity being associated with the role of the "problem solver" was apparent in the perspectives of the group of women I conducted a focus group discussion with. Their experiences are such that males are the ones who have the authority to make decisions within the family, and thus the family does not only seek guidance, but permission too when taking a decision. One woman mentioned that a "good family" is one where the male is in charge, be it the father or the oldest brother. A family that does not have a strong male figure is not a good family. This mindset also spills over into their expectations of their future husband, as one woman shared that her husband should be someone who "will take the first step and solve a problem and face a situation, without me asking him to".

These perspectives of masculinity by both men and the women I spoke with have their roots going deep into the expectations of males to fulfill certain social roles within the family, which as we know, is a big part of Indian social life. The woman, once married off is part of her husband's family, and therefore it is the sons who are expected to take responsibility of his family, after his father (middle class). There is an importance to managing one's emotions as a man and as a leader, for he is after all the leader of his family. Not only do his family members turn to him when there is a problem, he himself understands that if a problem occurs, as the head of the family, he is the one who needs to confront the problem and be able to solve it. If he loses control of his emotions, what sort of emotional security and stability is he ensuring his family? As Vivek shares, it is "a man's first instinct" to view himself as the person who confronts with problems and situations as they arise. As one man put it, "If there is a situation, I as a man would tell my family "let me go see what is up. You be safe, when it is alright you can come"". Therefore being emotionally tough is important. Expressing one's emotions is vulnerability, and vulnerability would make him less able to deal with difficult situations, making him less of a man.

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[45] Talbot and Quayle, 2010, p. 256-257

<u>Masculinity as being able to solve problems independently</u>

From these men's narratives, it is established that a man, because of his position within the family and the consequent responsibilities he is expected to take on, sees his gendered identity as being synonymous with being the leader in the family, as the one who is in charge. He and those in his family see him as the one accountable and responsible if anything goes wrong. The expectation that men should take on this responsibility is what lends to this specific construction of masculinity, and consequently men themselves in their everyday actions, attitudes and behaviors, internalize these expectations and reproduce this image of a man within themselves.

However, an interesting thing I discovered in my conversations with these men is this: that a man's capacity to face a situation or challenge is seen not as a collective effort with those around him, but is instead seen as a personal and individual endeavor. In other words, his manliness hinges on his ability to not only face a problem, but to face it independently without others' help:

> "Men like to go into a shell, keep quiet, not let anybody disturb us. It could be our ego, our pride, or the way society sees it, we tend to want to solve our problems on our own" – Arjun

> "Men, unless it really important, don't share problems with others. They try and solve it on their own. We think it can be taken care by ourselves." - Kunal

> "Its not that I don't want to share, I'm happy to. But I want to try all the options available to solve it and get it out of my way, and then let me talk about the fact that I've solved it" – Jay

Many of these men, when pressed further, revealed why they are reluctant to share their problems with others, even if the other person might be able to help them. To these men, talking about a problem and sharing it with another person as a way of seeking help is tantamount to being someone who merely complains and lacks the ability to do something about his situation.

This on the surface could perhaps reflect a mere pet peeve that these men uncannily have in common. However, Davis and Wagner suggest that it is more nuanced than that, and this mindset has more to with toughness and vulnerability. Male expression is taboo, and men are taught to "take it like a man" for, "complaining and expressions of outrage" are

viewed as whining[46]. This is dangerous, according to them, for an embodiment of such hegemonic masculinity illegitimates genuine outrage, grief, and frustration from a man be viewed as whining and not being 'man enough'. Such an ideology "imposes a code of silence on boys [and men], requiring them to suffer without speaking of it [….]. To remain silent is strong and masculine, and to speak out is not"[47] As these men's' responses demonstrate, even middle-class, professional young men in a metropolitan city like Bangalore, are susceptible to the imposition of these hegemonic masculinities, which Kaufman warns, causes men to tend "to suppress a range of emotions, needs, and possibilities such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy, and compassion, which are experienced as inconsistent with the power of manhood"[48].

These men's notions on masculinity have important implications on gender relations. This could be seen with respect to Indian women who are gaining the same kind of independence that men have; more women are becoming financially independent, leading to dual-income households where women are playing a bigger role in decision-making[49]. In this sense, the traditional notion that the man is the head of the family is being challenged in today's urban and middle-class India; the process of women's employment, education and empowerment are leading them to share this role with men. However, as the men and women's responses have shown, women's increased financial independence and higher education does not necessarily change the fact that it is masculinity and maleness that is associated with being the leader of the family. What's more, men's tendency to want to solve things by themselves and not seek help when facing a problem or situation may actually cause increased tension with their more assertive wives who want to be more involved in the family's decision-making process. As Jay shared, one of the biggest sources of tensions between him and his wife is his inability to communicate to her when there is a problem, for he feels the need to solve it himself and not 'burden' her with it.

As we have seen, masculinity among young professional males in Bangalore is synonymous with having financial stability and being able to take on familial responsibilities from the male head of the family. This essentially is to prepare them to become heads of their own families when they become husbands and fathers. Part of this 'head of the family'

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[46] Davis and Wagner, 2005, p. 33
[47] Klindlon and Thompson, 2000, p. 92
[48] Kaufman, 1999, p. 65
[49] Shukla, 1987

identity involves being in control of one's emotions and being able to solve problems and issues independently. For as the head of the family, they are the pillar of strength which members of the family look up to especially during tumultuous times. Thus, portraying or exhibiting emotional vulnerability will make him a weak head of the family who is incapable of guiding and ensuring his family's emotional security in tough times. Men account for their lack of emotional expression to this notion that men, as part of their role in the family and in society, and therefore reproducing what Speer calls the "regulative conceptions of masculinity" which men negotiated in everyday life and their interactions with each other[50].

2. Men's take on the High-Achieving, Successful and Career-Oriented Woman

Intellectual Acceptance Vs. Emotional Acceptance

The next natural question to explore is these men's attitudes and perspectives regarding women. Specifically, I was interested in their and their peers' perspectives and attitudes towards women who challenge the stereotypical and traditional gender script of Indian femininity. I asked these men about their thoughts on career-oriented women who were good at what they did, ambitious, and high achieving. Many, if not all the men, mentioned friends and women they knew personally who had those attributes. A Times of India article, *Women Make it Big in Offices[51]* identifies that women are increasingly being preferred in the workplace than men, for women have better people skills, creativity and are highly capable as leaders and managers. This was corroborated by the men's experiences, who have worked for female bosses and these men themselves spoke highly of these women, insisting that there are many effective and good female leaders in the working world. In their conversation about whether they preferred male or female managers, the men seemed to have the general consensus that "it doesn't matter if the manager is a man or woman, as long as they are a good leader". In general, the men I spoke to were accepting and open towards having women bosses and a bigger female presence in the workplace, saying that this is the norm now.

Their response is what Nirmala Menon, founder and CEO of Interweave Consulting[52] calls the 'rational response' to the higher number of women in the workplace and in

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[50] Speer, 2001, p. 110

[51] The Times of India, Jan 18, 2013

[52] Interweave Consulting is a human resources consulting company that focuses on diversity and inclusion in the corporate workplace.

positions of power. While on the macro-level, there is an acceptance of women having equal opportunities as men, which she terms "intellectual acceptance", the men are still lagging behind in terms of "emotional acceptance", and this is reflected in the every-day negotiations and tensions that take place in men and women's relations to each other. Nirmala has had countless years of experience heading the human resources departments in various companies in Bangalore, and she observes that men's response has been very much based on rationality; rationally, men have accepted that there is a need for women in the workplace and that women are also highly capable in jobs and industries that have been traditionally male. Hence in the workplace, men are indeed accepting, open and unbiased towards women colleagues and bosses.

However, the problem starts when these high-powered, career-oriented women get married, and that is when this lack of emotional acceptance in men is very evident and has detrimental consequences inevitably on the woman. Nirmala in her experience has seen that though they are 'open' to the idea of their wives working and having a career, men are still reluctant in taking on the consequent equal share of familial responsibilities that this would entail. There is a serious mental disconnect between what these men believe in, which may be egalitarian views of women, and what they do. For, when this group of women includes their own wives, their behavior contradicts their egalitarian beliefs. Moreover, this lack of acceptance can take on a more extreme form, which Nirmala laments is evident in the existing righteous beliefs held by many men that the husband should be the one with a higher qualification and a higher earning job than the wife.

This point of view corresponds to the responses I got from my interviewees. While insisting that they themselves wouldn't mind being with a more successful woman "as long as she was understanding", every respondent mentioned having peers who would not marry a woman with a higher paying job and a more successful career than he. In fact, some of these friends had broken up with their girlfriends when the woman started earning more than the men. A relationship where the woman is equal to or better than the man would result in an "ego clash", where the man would feel that his ego was being challenged by his wife. Here is an interesting disconnect that appears in these men's narratives: while distancing themselves from other 'chauvinistic' men who aren't in favor of being married to a more successful wife, they still succumb to the same mentality by putting the condition that they would only do so if she was "understanding" with him and that her superiority at

work would not subjugate his 'ego', self-esteem and manhood in the home.

A lot of this is really due to male insecurity vis-à-vis the control he has over his relationship to the woman in his life. When a man is with a woman who is, according to society's standards, 'better' or more superior to him, he feels threatened. This 'threat', has more to do with the consequent fear that such a woman, thanks to her independence, could potentially "walk out" of the relationship if she is unhappy with it or with him. Women's independence in other aspects of her life, especially financially, translates to a lack of dependence on her husband and their relationship. This is why, according to Arjun, "many men would prefer someone in their lives whom they know are dependent on them, someone who is a little below [than him], because it ensures that they wont run away".

This echoes the findings of a study by Joshua Hart et. al on male insecurities in relationships which lead to sexist and chauvinistic attitudes and behaviors towards women[53]. Hart and others found that for heterosexual men, women essentially represent both 'a promise' and 'a threat'; they provide a possibility for romantic blossoming, but they could equally represent romantic rejection or competitive defeat[54]. This is true in the context of young Indian urbanites; these women present the rather glamorous promise of having a 'modern woman' as a wife, but they simultaneously pose the risk of threatening a man's sense of worth, in a society that has traditionally judged him on his ability to be the head of the family and having control over his woman. Consequently, these men with a "deep-seated insecurities about romantic attachment directly, as well as indirectly, influence men's attitudes about women's proper place in the world in relation to men"[55].

But it is not just the men…

What is significant is that it is not just men who have this attitude, but women themselves too subscribe to such mental paradigms. Patriarchal norms are so deeply-rooted that there are educated women who decide that they cant have a more successful career than their husbands, as I found in the focus group discussion I had with a group of six women between the ages of 25 and 30 who are working in Bangalore. Most of them were hesitant when asked if they would want to be more successful than their future husbands. Their comments were uncannily similar to that of the men: "Being more successful than the guy

[53] Hart et. al, 2012
[54] Hart et. al, 2012, p. 1503
[55] Hart et. al, 2012, p. 1503

would only 'create problems'" was one of the comments mentioned, again, echoing the 'ego clashes' that the males were talking about.

Thus, these women despite being highly educated do a disservice to themselves by viewing herself as needing to be inferior to her husband to prevent potential fallouts. Nirmala again attributes this to the extremely deep-rooted patriarchal ideologies that still colour not only how men perceive their power vis-à-vis women, but women themselves reproduce this in how they view as acceptable and respectable femininity[56], and conversely masculinity. These women perpetuate men's status-quo as the higher earner and more educationally qualified one in the relationship by carrying traditional and conservative attitudes of what kind of man they should be marrying. Jay, in our conversation narrated the story of his best male friend who is working in the US with a very renowned tech company. His parents are trying to organize him an arranged marriage, but of the women that were approached, all of them rejected him because "he only had a bachelors degree". These women themselves were also Bachelor Degree holders, but they wanted to marry a man who 'is more qualified' than they are. This is a phenomenon that is happening in big cities all over in India, as an article in the New York Times, *In New Delhi, Women Marry Up and Men are Left Behind*[57] shows.

Women are not alone in this, because more than the women, the older generation continues to endorse this status quo, and this is manifested in the tradition of arranged marriages. The men whom I spoke to are all of 'marriageable age' and therefore are having similar negotiations and tensions with their parents, who believe that they should get married sooner rather than later. They shared with me their parents' requirements for their future wife, and one of it was that she must have 'an education', at least a Plus 2[58] or diploma, and ideally a Bachelors degree. However, their parents would not allow and arrange a marriage where the woman is more qualified or is earning more than their son. Another requisite is that the woman should not be older than the man. The logic is that such a woman has attributes that could potentially posit her in a more superior position vis-à-vis her husband, and this would only result in a relationship with little compatibility and harmony between husband and wife. The older generation, whose worldviews are still influenced by the patriarchal and less gender egalitarian family norms that they lived in growing up, are

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[56] Radhakrishnan, 2009, p. 201

[57] *In New Delhi, Women Marry Up and Men are Left Behind,* The New York Times, Jan 15th, 2013

[58] The Plus 2 is the Indian two-year pre-university program that students complete prior to entering university

resisting new family structures where the man and woman are on a more equal footing. So, even if there are men who are accepting and even would celebrate in being with a woman who enjoys a more successful career than him, they are confronted by family members who are against this.

3. Patriarchy – Modern and Redefined

It is a fact that patriarchal values are still very much embedded in Indian society, even within the more modern, progressive and Westernized strata of society, as the conversations I have had reveal. However, these values are indeed being redefined and taking on a very different form than a few decades back, Nirmala says. Women who have full time jobs and careers nowadays don't engage in the household chores such as cooking and cleaning as women in previous generations did. Economic stability is making it possible for women to "outsource" these feminine responsibilities to domestic workers. However, the responsibility of managing these chores – finding domestic helpers, ensuring that these chores are completed by the domestic help, that they have been paid on time – are still carried by the women. While the responsibility over the domestic realm still falls on the woman, she is smarter about it. Despite women not doing these chores themselves, these responsibilities still constitute a large part of their mental energy, and men don't have this share. Nirmala explains that this is a consequence of women being socialized deeply to feel that it is ultimately her responsibility to ensure her home and her family are well and that their needs are met physiologically and emotionally. As one of the men reasoned, "she herself knows that ultimately, that it is still more of her responsibility to take her of the house; that she will still need to take more of a sacrifice in terms of her career than a man would have to". Not only does she 'know' deep down that it is her responsibility, but that if she left this responsibility to her husband, "she will not only be left with a messed up kitchen, but a messed up child too!" as one man laughingly exclaimed.

However, Nirmala acknowledges that such attitudes and paradigms are changing, and that they are changing sooner rather than later. This was also the sense I got in speaking to the men about these issues. They were open to admitting that they knew of men and had friends who thought about women in a very conservative and limited way, but they were open to condemn such behaviors and attitudes. From their own personal experience in relationships and interactions with women, they are realizing that their notions of what it

means to be a woman are changing, and are very different from that of their parents' generation. For some, this is a source of confusion, as Navin shares the dilemma that he is going through in thinking about his future partner:

> "When you see a woman, the first way you identify with her is the way you identify with your mom, and you see her in light of how your mom has been. When you think of your future partner, in a way, you see your mother's image in her. As things are changing, it gets you into a dilemma; this is how you thought a woman would be like (referring to his mother), but in reality, she is very different, in fact a complete opposite of your mother."

Men are becoming increasingly more aware of these changes, and they realize that as women are changing, men themselves need to change in their approach and interactions with women, especially when it comes to decision-making in marriage. As one of the respondents shared, "Somewhere, men know that we have to let her have her opinion. She should have her say in decisions; you cannot just shove your thoughts down her throat. Men are becoming more considerate, becoming more respectful that way". In fact, it is not fashionable to be sexist and chauvinistic anymore, as Ankit shares, that among his larger friend group, it is not politically correct or "cool" to be gender biased. From his experience, men who make sexist comments are teased by other men, and are also socially shunned by some women. "Such a man is not a real man, he is someone with a complex" says Surya, referring to men who behave and think disrespectfully of women. "A man is someone who somebody who is sure of himself, who can stand up for people and at the same time take care of people. He wouldn't worry about doing things that would hurt his [male] ego."

4. Gendered Expectations in Marriage

So, while men are aware of these changes and the need for them to adapt accordingly, how does this awareness translate to attitudes, behaviors and expectations in marriage? The conversations I had with the male respondents on marriage were very interesting both for me and them. When asked why they wanted to get married, they gave a wide range of reactions, from laughter to momentary speechlessness, all of which ended in something along the lines of, "Well, because that is what we've been told to do and are expected to do. Society tells us we should *want* to get married and therefore we do". This is also true for the women I spoke to, though their reasons were also grounded on the need for companionship

and on convenience; a married woman, especially from more conservative family cultures, has more mobility and is able to navigate society more easily than a woman who is single, who would be at the receiving end of family gossip and social stigma. Yet, just as there are men, there are more women who are saying no to an early marriage, or simply, no to marriage at all, though this number is still very small[59]. Based on the conversations I had, everyone agreed that despite having rather 'modern parents' who were liberal on other fronts, they were very insistent that their children get married, and married soon.

Who can have a life plan?

Because marriage is perceived almost as the natural next step, an important rite of passage in one's life, I was interested in understanding what they thought were men and women's expectations of each other in a marriage. 'Expectations' is a key word here, for they are the thoughts that we project into the future and they are the basis on which we make judgments about our reality. In addition, it would give us an understanding of what men think constitutes appropriate masculinity in the women's eyes, for as Goddard argues in his study on *The Female Gaze and the Construction of Masculinity,* "masculinities are closely tied to their perceptions of what [the men] think women expect of them"[60]. By asking them this, I was hoping to understand what these men's predispositions were with respect to how they thought about women's needs and what women want out of a life partnership, and to see if this differed from what men claim the want.

On the surface, the answers that I received were similar; according to these men, both men and women want someone who is understanding, caring and loves them unconditionally as life partners. However, digging deeper into the question and looking at the specifics, I found some very interesting dynamics. Women, according to these men, appreciate men with a good sense of humor, "someone who can make her laugh when she is feeling down". He should be sensitive to her needs and is respectful towards her. 'Needs' according to these men were defined as both physical needs, such as help when she is sick and help with managing household chores, and emotional needs, such as being there for her when she was feeling emotionally down. He "should not miss out on the things he shouldn't be missing out on", such as birthdays, anniversary and other important dates.

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[59] *Marriage is Not for All Women,* The Times of India, April 1st, 2013
[60] Goddard, 2000, p. 23

Spending time with her is very important, as a woman would want to do a lot of activities with her husband. Therefore it is important that a man knows how to manage a good balance between his work and his relationship with her, for "she has married him to be with him, not so he can be with his job". One man summed up the rest of his peers' thoughts: "women expect their husbands to be able to take care of them".

When asked about what men themselves expect from women, the answers looked slightly different, but an important difference to note. Almost all agreed that it was important that their wives worked and had a job, especially because it is impossible to live in a city like Bangalore on a single-income. Some men expect their future wives to have "lives of their own" and not be a traditional wife who stays at home. For as one man said, "I am not looking for somebody who can cook, that when I come back from the office she would be there to do things for me". This is reflective of the fact that in many middle-class and urban families, there are employed household helps that are paid to do such chores, thus alleviating the wife of such chores. Hence, what was more important to these men was that their partners would be similar to them in their thinking and shared similar ideas on things such as how to manage finances, for example. The underlying theme in all these men's responses was 'support'; what they expect is their wives to be understanding and supportive.

The important point to be emphasized is the difference between the meanings associated with being "taken care of" which is what women want, versus "support" which is what men want. Based on the men's narratives, taking care in this context seems to just stay on the level of the mundane, trivial every-day 'needs' of women, subscribing to the stereotypical gender script that women mostly seek romantic attention and love from their husbands. This is corroborated by a cross-cultural study done on American, Turkish and Indian couples, which found that women score higher than men in terms of having more romanticized ideals of what they seek in a relationship or marriage[61]. My interviewees' answers were not too far off when compared to the answers women gave me in the group discussion: women wanted their husbands and life partners to be loyal, sensible, understanding, respectful, emotionally sensitive, and to be secure financially, so that she is secure and that their family would be 'taken care of'.

On the other hand, support connotes something very different. By definition, support means: "to promote the interest or cause of something or someone"; to "uphold or

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[61] Medora, Larson, Hortacsu & Dave, 2002

defend", and "to assist or help"[62]. Men in this sense, expect their wives to promote their interest, whatever this may be. As Jay perfectly encapsulates this:

> "[I would like] somebody who listens to what I have to say and is willing to understand…Somebody who understands my perspective of life, my ideas and thoughts and plans for life, *and will be a part of it*. It doesn't matter if she has a few dislikes of things that I like, or if we are polar opposites on some tastes. But the plan I have for life, *if she is by and large with me and my plan*, that is what I'm looking for" (italics mine).

Men seek someone who will support them in the vision they have for their lives, someone with whom they will be able to *share their own life plan with*. Life plan here refers to visions of the future that will inevitably include an overlap of different realms of one's life. What is interesting, and telling, is that these men do not mention the possibility of women wanting support from their husbands in the pursuit of *their life plans*.

The question is, who is in the position to have a life plan and have the means and support to pursue it? From the conversations that I've had with these men, it is clear that it is still men who primarily set the terms of the trajectory that life will take, and when they get married, the woman will join in *his* journey, and will be there to cheer him on, giving him the 'support' he needs throughout the journey. From how these men conceive of what women might want from their husbands, it does not include the possibility of women having a life plan of their own and therefore needing support from their husbands. A woman having a life plan does not even come up in the conversation. The narrative is still male-centric, reflective of the traditional patriarchal norms of the man being the focal point of the family and in society, and women serving as the pillar for their husbands' goals and aspirations.

Hence, being a man is not only tied to the role of the head of the family, but is also latently tied to this notion of being the one with the privilege of having a life plan. The two in a way are inextricably linked, for as the head or the leader the family, it is the leader who has the authority to envision the path that the whole team will take. Men's identity is still tied to the gendered ideal of being the head of the family, and this notion frames their perceived expectations of what men and women want from each other in a marriage. Having been brought up with such gendered ideals, he imagines himself as being the main protagonist of his life and when a women enters his life through marriage, she is seen as someone who will participate in the edifice of his life, of which he is the architect, and be there to support his

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[62] The Online Merriam-Webster Dictionary, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/support

life plan. She may have other interests or career-related aspirations and she may pursue them, but she "should be understanding" and not let them get in the way of the vision that he has for their lives as a couple and a family, for he is the 'head' after all.

Conclusions and Way Forward

Thus what we see is a very interesting phenomenon. These men's notions of what it means to be a man in urban and modern India today is still very much reflective of the traditional and gendered family structure, where the head of the family is almost always male. A man's identity is hinged upon this gendered role and his behaviors and attitudes are expected to be aligned with that of this role. As a man, he needs to be independent to be able to take on familial responsibilities; he needs to be emotionally and mentally strong and have a good control over his emotions to be able to confront the trials and tribulations of life; and in confronting difficult situations, he needs to be able to confront them without the help of others, for it would reflect negatively on him as the leader of the family. With respect to extremely chauvinistic patriarchal norms, these men are realizing the dangers of them and therefore are rejecting such attitudes. With more female colleagues in the workplace, these men are noticing that there have been a lot of positive changes with respect to their male peers' perceptions and attitudes towards women. Hence, men are more seen to be accepting and supporting of women bosses and colleagues in the workplace.

However, this is merely an acceptance at the intellectual and rational level, for men are still lagging behind in terms of the emotional acceptance; the deeply-embedded ideals of manliness and the male ego surface in personal relationships with women, where men are still reluctant and resistant to a wife who is more successful than or is earning more than he is. In the realm of marriage, men have very gendered notions of what men and women expect from each other: women expect their husbands to take care of them and be there for them emotionally, whereas men expect women to support them in the plan they have for life. This raises the question of who has the privilege of having a life plan, and revealingly and unsurprisingly, the deeply embedded patriarchal norms of Indian society dictate the conversation to continue to be male-centric and male-focused.

These men's notions of masculinity, male gender roles and their perceptions towards women reveal the existing uphill task for advocates of gender equality in urban India, such as those whose work is improving gender diversity in the formal workplace. However, it is

useful to remember that these notions are not static and rigid, for men themselves are realizing that times are changing and in order to have more fulfilling relationships with women, they too need to change their attitudes towards women. Yet, changing their mindsets on women is not enough if their perceptions of themselves as men are tied to the old, traditional and hegemonic forms of masculinity, whose existence depended on the subordination of women. There needs to be a re-envisioning of the 'head of the family' role that is the nucleus of the Indian family structure. The ideal of the 'family head' in the Indian context needs to be more flexible, so as to be more inclusive of women and the traits, strengths and attributes that they possess and bring to the table. A redefinition of this notion will hopefully include women in the process of envisioning a life plan both in a marriage and a family, and simultaneously redefine what it means to be a man in Indian society. Then, 'being man enough' would not focus the conversation to be exclusively male-centric, but instead, to also be inclusive of the other half of gender.

Recommendations for further study

One of the biggest limitations of this study is that it focuses on the attitudes that men carry with them prior to entering marriage and having a family of their own. Future studies should include analyzing how masculinity and male gender norms actually manifest in reality, once these men are married. A possible study in the future could look at young and newly married couples with dual-income and how gendered notions of masculinity influence decision-making, marriage satisfaction and overall well-being of the man and the woman in the relationship.

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