Introduction

Men and masculinities only moved on to the development agenda in the 1990s. Initial efforts to enhance economic development in colonial and postcolonial nations and territories paid little attention either to women or inequality between the sexes. Development was regarded as an economic issue that, when done properly, would benefit all citizens. This orthodoxy only began to be challenged in the 1970s, when a few key studies discovered that women had very different experiences of development projects than men. Women gradually became a development issue, women in development (WID) programs emerged, and projects addressing women’s issues slowly expanded. Men were generally ignored or regarded as impediments to these efforts.

However, as the limitations of WID programs became more apparent in the late 1980s, the focus began to shift from women to gender, with its emphasis on the social construction of norms and practices around masculinity and femininity and their impact on gendered opportunities and relations. Gender and development (GAD) programs began to explore the way attitudes and practices of men affected women’s prosperity and positions. The Fourth International Meeting on the Status of Women held in Beijing in 1995 reinforced this growing concern, and the resulting Plan of Action placed men as well as women on the development agenda, calling for mainstreaming gender into all policies, programs, and institutions (see chapter by Sweetman in this volume). Men began to surface in development programs, but more often as impediments to women’s advancement than as a factor in the gendered distribution of power and authority. Early projects focused on the role of men in the spread of HIV/AIDS, violence against women, and opposition to women’s empowerment. Since the turn of the century, increasing attention has been paid to the developmental problems of men and boys, particularly their underperformance in schools, high levels of youth unemployment, involvement in crime, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. There has been much talk about a crisis of masculinity, of the need to change toxic masculine practices and to create sensitized men who will be allies in the struggle for gender equality. Less has been said about the material and social consequences of patriarchal privilege and its consequences for men and women around the world.

The chapter documents the introduction of men, boys, and masculinities into development policies and programs, first as development problems requiring new attitudes and practices,
and later also as potential allies in efforts to achieve gender equality. It seeks to evaluate the transformative potential of these efforts, paying particular attention to the silences about gendered hierarchies of power, their implications for deep-seated resistance to gender equality, and the limitations of current approaches for achieving gender equality in an increasingly complex, unequal and gendered world.

**Bringing men and boys into development**

Attempts to organize and promote economic development in colonial and later postcolonial nations and territories generally assumed that women and men would benefit equally from efforts to improve the economies of the “Third World.” The resurgence of feminism in the 1960s raised questions about women’s inequality and inspired investigations into the impact of development programs and policies on women. Studies revealed very different and unequal consequences for women and men, and spurred the emergence of programs to address these inequalities. In the 1970s, WID programs began to emerge in key development institutions, and programs to address the developmental problems facing women became increasingly common. The first UN-sponsored World Conference on Women took place in Mexico in 1975, where the Decade of Women was declared (1976–1985) and the organization UNIFEM was established (later evolving into UN Women). In 1979, the United Nations passed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The focus centered on women and the role of men was rarely addressed.

The 1980 World Conference on Women in Copenhagen concluded that men should be more involved in efforts to improve women’s position in societies around the world, but little emerged from these discussions. For the next 15 years, the role of men in promoting (or inhibiting) women’s rights received little attention. During that time, the limitations of women-oriented development projects made for depressing reading. Women had entered employment in increasing numbers, yet rarely led important economic institutions. They were more active in politics, but still largely absent from positions of political power. Thus development programs and projects had done little to break male dominance over social, economic, and political power. The critiques of WID, particularly its failure to pay attention to the complex realities of poverty, race, ethnicity, and class for women living in the Global South, inspired a gradual shift to gender and development (GAD), with its emphasis on the power relations shaping the lives of poor women and men in the Global South (and North). The concept of gender focused on the socially constructed attitudes and practices associated with women, femininities, men, and masculinities and their impact on relations between men and women as well as the gendered distribution of power and influence in particular societies. Men thus entered into development discussions, albeit largely as impediments to women’s empowerment rather than as solutions to gender inequality (Sweetman 2013; White 1997).

The 1995 Beijing conference reinforced this shift and the resulting *Plan of Action* declared that men and women should share power and responsibility and work in partnership towards gender equality, especially in the areas of education, socialization of children, childcare and housework, sexual health, gender-based violence, and the establishment of more equitable work–life balance for both sexes. The *Plan of Action* introduced gender mainstreaming (GM) as the primary mechanism for achieving gender equality in all institutions, programs, and policies in governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). GM became the vehicle of choice for ensuring the empowerment of women and gender equality around the world. The *Plan of Action* thus shifted the discussion of men’s roles in gender and development to more concrete issues. Yet, while men were presented as essential to this undertaking, in practice the...
emphasis continued to focus on women’s empowerment and the need to pay attention to differences among women, particularly around race, ethnicity, class, and age. GAD projects aimed to transfer resources and support to women in the Global South in order to enable them “to put their own agendas and priorities into action and challenge the current top-down, male-biased model of global development” (Sweetman 2013: 3). Programs for men generally focused on their role in this process rather than on the deeper issues facing men and boys, particularly the masculine norms associated with manly “success” and the difficulties of achieving these goals in an increasingly global, neoliberal world (Connell 2005; Cornwall et al. 2012).

The focus on women soon foundered as projects designed to empower women often challenged power relations between women and men, inadvertently fueling male hostility and raising tensions between the sexes that sometimes flared into violence at home and in communities. Male hostility to women’s advancement troubled advocates of gender equality and women’s empowerment, raising questions about men and masculinity. Leaving men out of efforts to improve women’s lives and achieve gender equality became increasingly difficult to defend. Drawing on the expanding research on men and masculinities, particularly by Raewyn Connell (2005), some gender and development scholars and practitioners began to explore the impact of masculine norms and practices on the behavior of men, particularly hostility towards women-centered empowerment projects. As Connell points out, only a small minority of men are able to fulfill the expectations associated with hegemonic masculinity. The norms and practices associated with and expected of male elites, particularly the emphasis on masculine power, superior strength and intelligence, as well as the ability to protect and control women, children, and subordinate males, are out of reach for many men. Thus, while patriarchal ideals based on male power over females are regarded as a social ideal in most societies, this ideal has become increasingly difficult for many men to achieve. As Sweetman (2013: 4) points out, “for the majority of men, there is a level of anxiety around living up to ideals of masculinity.” This anxiety has fueled a backlash against development projects that are seen as threatening masculine privilege, at any level, and raised concern about the need to understand and change the patriarchal attitudes underwriting this behavior.

This concern has intensified in the twenty-first century, which has witnessed an expansion of educational and employment opportunities for women, along with a global economic crisis that has undermined many traditionally male-dominated sources of employment such as construction, manufacturing, and investment. Young men in particular have found it difficult to live up to expected roles as breadwinners. Many (along with some women) have turned to illegal activities, including the drug trade and smuggling of persons and goods, in order to survive (see chapters by Townsend et al. and Samarasinghe in this volume). Armed conflicts have drawn young men (and some women) into battle, inuring them to violence and highlighting militarized masculine values (see chapter by Harris in this volume). The growing contradiction between masculine ideals as breadwinners and leaders and the realities on the ground are fueling resentment against more “successful” males and females, often leading to violence against the few people “failed” men can control, particularly the women and children in their households and communities (Catala et al. 2012).

In such an atmosphere, it is not surprising that many GAD projects aiming to empower women have encountered resistance from many males and undermined cooperation between women and men. The expansion of gender-based violence, even in a society such as South Africa with its exceptional gender-sensitive constitution and its high rate of women parliamentarians, highlights the difficulties facing efforts to rein in this behavior. The continuing spread of HIV/AIDS through unprotected sex, even among married couples, has raised questions about patriarchal privilege and the sexual behavior of men (Cornwell et al. 2012). The
underperformance of males in education has raised concerns about male underachievement and the long-term consequences for young men and society as a whole (Reddock 2004). All of these development crises highlight the limits of development projects that focus mainly on empowering women, and reaffirm the need to pay attention to the consequences of male frustration over their inability to live up to gender norms, particularly the expectation that they should protect and dominate women, children, and subordinate males.

Organizations such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have called for greater attention to the role of men and boys in the search for women’s empowerment and gender equality. The emphasis has been on identifying the socialization processes that maintain unequal gender roles and power relations, and designing programs that challenge these practices and encourage the adoption of more progressive gender norms built around ideals of non-violence, and “a sense of male pride and dignity based on progressive, gender based ideals” (Sweetman 2013: 5). The attempts to foster progressive gender relations that support women’s rights and gender equality in ways that benefit men, women, and the social worlds they live in have often focused on HIV/AIDS, education, and gender-based violence. Case studies on these flash points provide an entry point for evaluating both the strengths and weaknesses of these undertakings.

Men and development projects: case studies on HIV/AIDS, education, and violence

**HIV/AIDS**

The spread of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and after raised questions about male sexuality, sexual relations and practices and their impact on women’s lives, empowerment, and gender equality. The disease surfaced as a public health issue in North America, particularly among homosexuals, prostitutes, heroin addicts, and Haitians. The initial fight against HIV/AIDS centered on the risk-taking of these “social deviants,” often associated with people of African descent. However, as HIV/AIDS spread around the world, particularly to Africa, the focus shifted from risk-taking behavior to heterosexual couples, particularly women’s vulnerability. The statistics in Africa reported ten million young men and women aged 15–24 living with HIV/AIDS in 2003, with more than 75 percent being female. These statistics reflected the worldwide feminization of the epidemic and help to explain the shift from risks to the vulnerabilities causing this dramatic imbalance, particularly women’s disempowerment and the sexual dominance of heterosexual men over their wives, girlfriends, and contractual sexual partners (Barker and Ricardo 2006).

Male sexual behavior became the central explanation for women’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Older men were regarded as particularly problematic as they often had higher rates of infection as well as the resources to convince younger women to exchange sex for much-needed money and support. More broadly, the unequal balance of social power between males and females as well as patterns of risk behavior among men—such as the prevalence of multiple partners, the widely held assumption that men had a right to unprotected sex with wives, girlfriends, and especially in contracted sex, the distrust towards condoms and a widespread preference for dry sex—became central explanations for women’s vulnerability to the epidemic. Initial attempts to educate men (and women) about avoiding the disease had little success. Men continued to be seen as the problem, but development projects primarily focused on women’s vulnerabilities and ways to address them.

A growing awareness of the importance of men and masculinities in the struggle to contain and manage the HIV/AIDS crisis encouraged new approaches to the disease in the late 1990s.
The tendency to ignore or demonize men began to shift towards a more systematic incorporation of men and masculinities into HIV/AIDS projects. The language of gender mainstreaming in Beijing, followed by increasing attention to sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as the World AIDS Day campaign of 2000, identified men as potential allies in the struggle against the epidemic. Projects to deal with the epidemic flourished. Stepping Stones, originally developed in Uganda at the turn of the twenty-first century, aimed to improve sexual health by building stronger, more equitable and interactive relationships between the sexes that challenge destructive gender practices, particularly among young men. This approach has been adopted in more than 40 countries (Cornwall et al. 2012). Engender Health, an international non-governmental organization (INGO) focusing on gender equality and HIV/AIDS through the Men as Partners Project, has mobilized men to take an active stand for gender equality and against gender-based violence that encourages unequal gender relations and the vulnerability of women and some men (engenderhealth.org). These are just a sample of the many projects engaging men and boys in the fight against HIV/AIDS by encouraging changes in male attitudes and behavior towards women, sexuality, and family life (Bannon and Correia 2006; Sweetman 2013).

**Men, masculinity/ies and gender-based violence**

Gender-based violence and the attitudes that underwrite it have been a matter of concern for development projects seeking to contain and manage HIV/AIDS. The increasing attention to the attitudes and behavior of men and boys in HIV/AIDS projects in the 1990s coincided with a dramatic expansion of conflicts in the post-Cold War world. The increasing violence of men against women, as well as between men, in these struggles became a matter of grave concern for policymakers, academics, and development practitioners. While the violence between males fit easily with long-held notions of men, war, and conflict, the attacks on women—especially in Bosnia and Rwanda—raised serious questions about gender-based violence, especially in the developing world. Relations between men and women in the home provided a basis for thinking about gender-based violence, particularly the role of norms of male superiority over all females and subordinate males, as well as cultural practices that sanctioned male violence against women who challenged the standards expected of “good women.” The development community began to focus on these destructive patterns, setting up projects to challenge masculine practices that legitimated violence against women and urging men to change their behavior and take personal responsibility for confronting these practices (Bannon and Correia 2006; Cleaver 2002; Cornwall et al. 2012).

The use of rape as a weapon of war in the post-Cold War conflicts also dramatized the need to address sexual violence in conflicts as well as in the home and community. In 2008 the United Nations passed Security Resolution 1820, which officially recognized rape as a weapon of war (see Section 6). Civil society organizations such as the UN Women’s project PeaceWomen.org and the Global Network for Women Peacebuilders began to develop indicators to track and report evidence of rapes in order to highlight the issue and motivate states to take it seriously both during and after conflicts. Women Under Siege, a journalism project working to document sexualized violence as a weapon in global conflict in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has gone to great lengths to gather women’s stories and map incidences of rape worldwide. For example, the degree to which rape has been used as a weapon of war has been thoroughly documented in Syria through personal storytelling and ethnographic mapping.

Yet for the most part, rape as a weapon of war continues to be regarded as a discussion of rape of women by men. The emphasis has continued to focus on changing the attitudes and
behavior of men that encourage and participate in such actions. This framing neglects the reality that gender-based violence can provide an outlet for various power struggles, particularly in post-conflict environments and developing countries. The rape of men by men is rarely discussed, let alone confronted. The current conversations about gender-based violence also underplay the rape of LGBT and gender non-conforming individuals as well as the role of homophobia in this process, both locally and internationally. This bias towards rape as male violence against women has shaped development agencies’ response to rape in war and conflict-ridden societies, encouraging an assumption that all men are inclined to violence, that all men need to change their attitudes and practices towards women, and that heterosexual violence is the main issue that needs to be addressed (Sweetman 2013).

Some NGOs and development agencies have begun to recognize the role socialization plays in shaping and responding to traditional patriarchal masculine ideals and expectations. Small, local workshops where men are able to openly discuss and negotiate their masculinity with other men have provided an alternative vision of how men might explore their understanding and acting out of masculinity, as practiced in the CBC (Centre Bartolmé de las Casas) Masculinities Programme initiative in El Salvador (Bird et al. 2007). In 2000, UNICEF produced a series of educational films on masculinities designed to help young men explore the role of masculinity and how it relates to gender-based violence in South Asia. A UNFPA project worked with boys aged between 10 and 15 years to reflect on machismo culture and its impact on sexual violence. These are just a few examples of the many development projects confronting gender-based violence by addressing the role of masculinity as it impacts and shapes men on an individual psychological level, but broader structural practices also need to be considered, particularly those values being reinforced by patriarchal heteronormative state governments. Finally, to address the full spectrum of those impacted by gender-based violence, development policy and practice needs to develop and implement indicators that take into account those experiencing sexual violence because of their LGBT orientation. Attention to men raped by men would aid in closing the current gap in thinking about gender-based violence and sexuality.

**Men, masculinity and education**

Development discourse on women, gender, and education initially focused on unequal access to education, particularly for women and minorities. Applied research on gender and education in high income economies focused on the issues raised by diversity in the classroom. This challenge was compounded by the need to consider the concept of gender equality in the classroom in the late 1970s–early 1980s. The issue of equality based on gender as well as other factors such as race and class gained relevance as legal access to education for all became a reality for much of the world’s population. Researchers and development specialists began to explore the impact of gender in educational practices. A gender analysis of classroom reading material and textbooks highlighted their often negative impact on the relationship between subject choices and career options for girls. This research inspired development projects aimed at improving girls’ access to education, particularly if it enhanced their skills as future mothers and as contributing members of the family economy.

As the issue of male underachievement in education and its possible links to violence and the HIV/AIDS epidemic became matters of growing public concern in regions such as the Caribbean, policymakers increasingly shifted their focus from gender equality in the classroom to the implications of learnt masculinities for law and order. Much of this early research explored the relationship between the teacher and pupils and the perception of teachers about the
disruptive behavior of some boys. The research focused on how this behavior translated into male performance on the street for many 10–16-year-olds, ultimately contributing to the loss of capacity of young males to fulfill the masculine ideal of the male breadwinner, with its accompanying norms of masculine authority over women and subordinate males and its legitimation of patriarchal power and gendered hierarchies (Reddock 2004).

Concern with the declining capacity of young male students to fulfill the expectations of masculine roles has preoccupied many researchers and development practitioners concerned with gender and education, particularly in regions with high levels of crime and violence. The lawless, aggressive, anti-education culture of masculinity found in many parts of the world has become the focus of much of the work on masculinity and education. This work has interpreted male students’ disruption in the classroom as a precursor to the anti-social, often criminal behavior found on the streets around the world, particularly in low-income areas. The shift to the street has been seen as leading young men to choose criminality over work activities, thereby making the goals of education irrelevant and inconsistent with the expectations of adult manhood. This research has raised concerns among policymakers and development practitioners in areas such as the Caribbean, where male underachievement in school has been widely publicized and debated since the 1980s. It has been driven by a belief in the nexus between less than ideal male behavior in the classroom, criminality, and—by extension—a compromised ability of many males to assume their traditional roles as breadwinners and leaders in the home and society (Reddock 2004).

Although some of this research discussed the social construction of men, boys, and masculinity, most of it focused on developing a remedial policy response to masculine subjects in education. Boys were to be treated as a distinct category from girls. Teacher–pupil and classroom interaction was seen as a medium through which issues such as sexual harassment in schools, rape, sexual abuse of children, pornography, and deviant male sexuality could be approached and corrected. The research shifted from the behavior of masculine subjects in various schools and systems of education in the 1990s to a focus on the construction of masculinity and the recognition that schools are crucial socializing agents for young men (and women). This emerging area of inquiry explored the way institutions of learning fostered specific types of masculinities, while policing others. Instead of trying to investigate the behavior of various local students, the discourse around education and masculinity deepened to explore the relationship between the school and the student, the complex meanings around masculinities that were created by relationships between individuals and the schools they attend, and the diverse cultures of masculinities created as products of the sociology of schooling. Much of this work produced a policy response that endeavored to understand male school-based deviance by exploring the relationship between male anti-education behavior, schooling, and criminality (Reddock 2004).

However, male underachievement in schools remains largely a concern for middle and high income countries, where women and girls are increasingly outperforming men and boys. Consequently, most of the research, policy and programs addressing this issue occur in these regions. For example, the Caribbean Development Bank between 2004 and 2008 supported a research project exploring gender differentials between female and male enrolment and performance in secondary and tertiary education in the region. Government policies and development programs have drawn on such research to improve lagging male enrollment and performance at these levels. Yet male underachievement has little traction in the poorer regions of the world or among most development agencies, where the concern remains overwhelmingly centered on gender parity in access to schooling. The focus on equal access for women and girls influenced the efforts of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)³ to ensure gender parity in education by 2015 around the world. Indeed, the sexed differences around access to
education continue to frame development policy responses to gender and education, especially in the poorest regions of the world.

**Conclusion**

The gradual shift from women to gender has provided an entry point for bringing men and masculinities into development discourse and practice. The assumption that women’s position could be improved solely through women-centered development projects proved illusory, doing little to unseat masculine privilege and masculinist definitions of power and authority. The move to consider gender opened the possibility for dialoguing with men in order to explore the way masculine attitudes and behavior have affected the drive for gender equality and women’s empowerment in particular contexts. Despite a tendency to revert to the more comfortable focus on women and girls, development practitioners and researchers concerned with men and masculinity have sought to understand and address the beliefs and practices among men and boys (and some females) that legitimate male privilege and oppose efforts to produce a more gender equitable world. Challenging these toxic beliefs and practices and encouraging new more gender-sensitive ways of thinking and behaving have become important strategies for encouraging support for gender equality and reducing gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, and gender disparities in education and employment.

At the same time, the effort to challenge and alter masculine attitudes and behavior that oppose gender equality takes place in a world where gendered assumptions still largely define which sexed bodies, performances, sexuality, and positionalities are seen as deserving the material and social rewards offered in particular societies. Trying to change long-held assumptions about what kinds of men (and women) should wield power is extremely difficult, as those who benefit from such systems are rarely willing to step aside for a more gender-equitable system. Convincing the powerful to give up their privileges is never easy, and it is even more difficult if many men (and some women) who benefit more indirectly from masculinist privilege still believe even their minimal power and authority will be threatened if the gendered structures of power are altered. Power has too often been seen by development agencies as “something that can be bestowed or acquired rather than a structural relation that is in itself gendered. And targeted ‘investment’ has come to displace any consideration of the broader social changes that need to take place if the persistent inequalities associated with gender difference are to be eradicated” (Cornwall et al. 2012: 1). These broader social changes threaten the status quo of many and thus will rarely be supported by policymakers and even large sections of the public. Indeed, it is not surprising that the World Bank—despite its 2012 *World Development Report* committed to enhancing gender equality—is increasingly focusing on women and girls as the “solution” to gender equality (Chant 2012).

At the same time, the twenty-first century has produced conditions that are beginning to shift perceptions about gender relations, men, and masculinity/ies, particularly their role in causing or challenging gender-based violence. Some development agencies now see gender-based violence not only as a threat to women’s empowerment, but also as a systemic reaction of men grappling with their own struggles with (dis)empowerment on shifting economic and political sands. As most of the world continues to suffer from growing inequality, high levels of unemployment—especially among young men—and competition from increasingly skilled women entering the workforce are giving rise to new social tensions that sometimes have dangerous outcomes (Catala et al. 2012). Recognizing the larger psychological implications of these social changes for men is essential to understanding and responding to gender-based violence as well as gender equality in general. Shifting power dynamics driven by women
moving into the workforce are challenging traditional patriarchal structures. The same can be said for women taking on new roles in government. A recognition of the complexities for men in adjusting to a society where women are gaining access to new forms of power can inform an understanding of how to respond to these changes and challenges in ways that potentially bode well for the prospects of both men and women.

Responses to recent crises have too often focused on the inherent violence of males and the need to convince men to change their attitudes and behavior. Certainly masculinist privilege continues to be a crucial factor reinforcing gender inequality around the world. However, the changing international political economy privileges hegemonic masculine authority, but the reach of that privilege is smaller, leaving many men as well as women struggling to survive in an increasingly hostile world (Catala et al. 2012; Connell 2005). Growing attention given to the problem of men and violence demonstrates the importance of environment and socialization, culturally dominant ideas and beliefs regarding acceptable masculine behavior, and images and stereotypes present in men’s lives. The current focus on the responsibility of individual males is not enough. A deeper examination of the problematic nature of continued masculine authority and violence of the state needs to be incorporated into development policies and practices (Cornwall et al. 2012). Support for gender equality and a more gender equitable world will require collaboration with both men and women, a profound understanding of the patriarchal structures that underwrite and support gender bias in societies around the world and a set of policies and programs designed to undertake long-term change in the complex, highly rooted gender systems around the world. The current economic and political crises provide an opening, but also a challenge, as patriarchy could regroup and become more entrenched—witness much of what has happened in the Middle Eastern “Arab Spring.” The need for broad social change has never been greater, but it will require determination and a commitment for women and men to work together to create a more gender equitable and fairer world.

Notes

1 I would like to thank my research assistants from the PhD program on Global Governance and Human Security at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, for their assistance with this article. They are: Deborah McFee, Jamie Hogan, and Polliann Hardeo.

2 Gender equality needs to be understood not as nuanced analysis of the differences between groups of women and men but, in this research, more apt to focus on differences in the classroom between an unproblematized sexed category of female and male students.

3 The MDGs were orchestrated by the United Nations in 2000 and widely supported.

References


Men, masculinities, and development