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Chapter 7
Shifting Masculinities in the South Asian Outsourcing Industry

Hyper, Techno, or Fusion?

Yasmin Zaidi and Winifred R. Poster

The expansion of the information and communication technology (ICT) industry has generated interesting shifts in global relations and financial flows, with a potential to reverse the historical global North-south relation grounded in a colonial past. The changes wrought by the ICT industry have influenced how work is organized, and the ripple effect is on how relations, especially gender relations, are organized and experienced. This chapter will focus on shifting masculinities in the knowledge work organizations and, their lesser cousins, the call centers. Based on research in two countries (India and Pakistan) at different levels in the hierarchy of the world economy (software engineers and developers and international call center workers), the chapter looks at the interplay between the global and the local and how it plays out in professional and personal relations. Hegemonic masculinity is challenged here, undermined, and reshaped by what has been called techno-masculinity (Poster 2013b), where the "geek" with an arsenal of techno-skills does not require the brawn or the capital infrastructure of the industrial age to demonstrate prowess and shine on the global stage.

Are these emerging South Asian masculinities transgressive or regressive of gender relations or both? Does a country's context and position in the outsourcing industry hierarchy make a difference, or are there some common threads that can be drawn across these different sites? What tensions mark this new terrain, where local masculinities compete with, shape, and are shaped by the global? Critically, do we see what Ashis Nandy (1983) has seminally termed a *hyper*-masculinity, what Winifred R. Poster (2013b) calls *techno*-masculinity, or is there a fusion of the local and global? Understanding these dynamics and comparing them within two similar

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yet unique countries of South Asia, home to 1.5 billion people, provide an insight into how the macro and the global impact the micro and the local.

In India the analysis draws on research from a series of contained fieldwork periods spread out over the last two decades involving interviews with ICT managers, engineers, factory workers, and call center agents, observations of work environments, and document analysis. For Pakistan the primary research was carried out in two sites with two international call centers over 2 years and included participant observations and interviews with management, young male and female employees, and their families.

After a theoretical discussion on masculinities and a brief description of the methods, the chapter presents the empirical evidence for the emergence of masculinities that do not neatly fit into the earlier theoretical constructs and instead terms these "fusion masculinities."

7.1 Understanding Masculinities in Transnational Workplaces

7.1.1 From Hegemonic Masculinities...

Masculinity are "those practices and ways of being that serve to validate the masculine subject's sense of self as male/boy/man" (Whitehead 2002, 4). Masculinities are expressed through the identity work: the performances and displays that are context and culture specific yet carry certain hegemonic strains that are similar across cultural and geographic boundaries. Hegemonic masculinity has dominated research on masculinities in the past two decades, but it is also a contested term attracting criticisms for its perceived static meaning. Hegemonic masculinity applied to the study of organizations uncovers their gendered nature and reveals how it is institutionalized, particularly in the military and the police. These exaggerated traits of what it means to be a man may not be similar across contexts, but it is normative in its measurement of men against a presumed ideal and the subordination of women.

However, a new understanding has emerged of masculinities experienced and shaped by diverse men in diverse contexts. The discourse on masculinities thus includes an "explicit recognition of the geography of masculinities, emphasizing the interplay among local, regional, and global levels" and a "more specific treatment of embodiment in contexts of privilege and power" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 829); the struggles of the colonized come to mind.

This view of hegemonic masculinity, ever changing and contested by "local masculinities," also challenges the notion of a "hyper-masculinity" (Nandy 1983) defined by traits of risk taking, violence, and subordination of women. More recently, the practice of hyper-masculinity on Wall Street (vividly portrayed in the

film *Wolf of Wall Street*)[1] and on the stock exchange floor (Salzinger 2003) has come to the fore.

Thus hegemonic masculinities can be conceptualized as an amalgam of social practices, institutions, and societal norms, all grounded in a peculiar sociohistoric context that are used flexibly by men, aligning or distancing themselves from these norms as desired through the interaction (Wetherell and Edley 1999). This understanding of hegemonic masculinities allows for the interaction of local masculinities with the regional or global ones, giving agency to actors and revealing the richness and complexity of "doing masculinities" and the mechanisms that emerge from the contradictions so encountered.

7.1.2 ...Via Techno-Masculinity...

Nowhere are these contradictions more manifest than in the information and communication technology industry. The global flows of ICT and finance have swept into agricultural economies dominated by precise and segregated gender norms. Individuals anchored in these societies swirl into the global competitive market, adopting and adapting new workplace norms and compromising, challenging, and shifting notions of what it means to be a man.

Techno-masculinities describe one set of such norms exhibited by professional ICT workers in the global South who are gaining ascendancy over their counterparts in the global North (Poster 2013b), posing a challenge to their long-held and institutionalized dominance – a dominance that, through the processes of colonization and capitalist imperialism, has been ingrained in the way in which the South views itself. Conventional masculinity, based on physical and military prowess, moved to accommodate the neoliberal agenda based on technological prowess (machines, cars, and computers) and expertise. Such prowess has been perceived as the domain of the West, with few technological advances attributed to the global South.

While knowledge in the South Asian subcontinent was a marker of high caste, age, or spirituality, during colonial and postcolonial times it became increasingly the domain of the elite defined in economic terms – wealth, income, and proximity to the structures of colonial power to name a few. Notwithstanding the debates about what constitutes knowledge, in its conventional sense it could only be accessed by the privileged few who had the necessary (English) language skills.

In the new economy where information and "algocracy" (Aneesh 2006, 2009) are delinked from capital and the need for extensive infrastructures of production, where the commodity is information and where location and ethnicity are hidden behind layers of technology and "virtual bodies" (Hearn 2006, 949) and have the potential to generate new identities, the average man can attain power through his

[1] The 2013 successful film is based on the memoirs of Jordan Belfort, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, and is directed by Martin Scorsese, starring Leonardo DiCaprio. http://finance.yahoo.com/news/wolf-wall-street-says-ll-184200507.html

ability to harness the technical expertise and appropriate technology produced elsewhere. In the transnational arena, in global workplaces, these techno-masculinities are most visible in the outsourcing of software development to companies in the global South, notably India, and in the call center industry.

Drawing on previous work by Poster (2013b), as well as Nandy (1983), Connell et al. (2005), and others, the concept of techno-masculinity is used to explain the similarities and differences that crop up in a globalized workplace and to explore South Asian techno-masculinities at different levels, given the role of the Indian ICT industry in the global market and the small but important role of the industry in Pakistan.

Examination of India reveals the increasing dominance of its ICT industry on the world scale. It also explores how Indian male professionals – the techno-entrepreneurs, the knowledge workers, and the cyber managers – are gaining momentum relative to those of the USA and other global North countries. At the lower levels of the information economy, Indians are asserting their techno-masculinities as workers in the field of ICT service. This involves more micro-kinds of agencies: interactional power within conversations between an employee and customer. Here, the information economy offers tools for working- and middle-class men in India in the form of knowledge power, technical skills, and virtual mutability (Poster 2013b).

India's investment in technology schools paid off as it emerged as one of the countries that were poised to take advantage of the boom in ICT-related growth. The availability of qualified technical professionals has led to the outsourcing of production and jobs to India and the migration of Indian, mostly male, professionals to the USA and to European countries. Indians are also in the forefront as technology entrepreneurs. The Indian IT and business process management (BPM) industry has grown from $100 million to $100 billion in two decades (Chandrashekhar 2014), adding 2 million people to the industry in the last decade. Starting from call centers and low-end IT work for international companies, the industry moved up the global hierarchy offering management consulting and research and development services. It is the largest private sector employer with 3.1 million employees, more than 1 million of whom are women (NASSCOM n.d. a). In just one area of the IT-BPM industry, engineering, the global offshore revenues of traditional and emerging engineering products are expected to reach $100 billion, of which India expects to get around 40 % equivalent to $40–45 billion by 2020 (NASSCOM n.d. b).

A new breed of technology entrepreneurs – echoes of Silicon Valley – is entering the market, offering software products. The country's annual revenues from software products are expected to grow to $11 billion by 2015. Many are leaving lucrative jobs to set up their own firms and look for innovative solutions to India's problems, such as a low-cost prescreening device that can identify up to five major eye problems and can be used by minimally trained technicians (Wadhwa 2010).

As skilled knowledge workers, Indians and the Indian diaspora have created networks from which have emerged a "transnational capitalist class" (Upadhyay 2004) supporting other Indian professionals through mentoring and venture capital. These networks are well positioned to leverage economic and political resources, for

example, the appointment of an Indian-American as the first "Chief Information Officer" for the White House in 2009 or the election of Bobby Jindal (engineer, Indian origin) as the first nonwhite governor in the state of Louisiana.

Clearly, these individuals are no longer followers; rather they are emerging as the vanguard of the era of new technologies. Clearly too, ICTs have the potential for men from the global South, irrespective of class, language, and geography, to transcend these boundaries of domination and gain a place among the global valorized community of "geeks" and "nerds." The emergence of techno-masculinities may pose a challenge to hegemonic masculinity. Understanding how techno-masculinities are formed and the challenge they pose not only to the imagery of manhood but also to its basis of power and shifting ethnocentricities is important.

The first departure point for understanding the emerging masculinities is the salience given to being a member of a group that has access to, and understanding of, technology beyond the conventional motorbikes and automobiles. Admission into the club is not dependent on the possession of social or financial capital alone. As technology entrepreneurs, software developers, data processors, and others like them, the new man is defined by his place in the ICT landscape, with its own multi-layered hierarchy. Information, knowledge, the Internet, and its networks are all resources that techno-masculinities can draw upon. These new masculinities have shifted the location of power from the global North and increasingly also shifted the centers of economic power. The flows are best described with the example of the Indian expatriates, many of whom are ensconced in Silicon Valley or the technology corridor in Massachusetts, USA,[2] investing in technology businesses in India. Simultaneously wealthy Indian corporations increase their investments in American and European companies, often buying up businesses, for example, the purchase of Virgin Radio Holdings (Scotland) by the Times of India (Timmons 2008). Indian businessmen are increasingly replacing North-south business partnerships with South-South partnerships.

Indian managers in multinational firms pose a challenge to techno-masculinities of the North as well, as they resist, reinterpret, and devise policies that differ from that prescribed by the head office, for example, expanding "flex time" and "alternative work options," adding subsidies that were not available to the senior managers at the head office or ignoring gender equity and diversity guidelines (Poster 2008).

Even at the lower end of the ICT industry – handling back office clerical work or consumer sales and services, among other things – techno-masculinities are exercised when customers (from the global North) interface with the employees (from the global South) during virtual interactions. Using technical knowledge, emotional management and labor (Hochschild 2003), and gender bias, techno-workers exercised superiority, "man" power, and stereotyping to look down upon their customers, for example, American consumers, who "like children," cannot even find "the start button on the computer" (Poster 2013b, 124). Call center workers see

[2] Immigrants were founding members of half the start-up firms in Silicon Valley in 2005, with the largest group belonging to India (Wadhwa et al. 2007), and 12 % of all biotech firms in Massachusetts have been founded by Indians.

themselves as more tech savvy in relation to their North American customers who have to be walked through basic computer skills.

However, not all global workplaces are sites for exercising techno-masculinities. It is at the lower-end work of call centers that studies in the field have concentrated to reveal the tensions between local and global and to study the micro-interactions that shape workers identities. There is a need to dig deeper and research on how this ambivalence is managed at a personal level, especially in terms of shaping masculinities.

7.1.3 ...To Fusion Masculinities

While the concept of techno-masculinities does pose a challenge to hegemonic masculinity, it does not satisfactorily answer how, within a presumed hierarchy of software engineers/developers and customer service representatives, does the possibility of being an IT hero influence men's perceptions of themselves and their practices of masculinity. Call centers are lower in this hierarchy: a place where customer service representatives and salespersons work with the clients in the North, providing scripted technical assistance and selling products. This interaction also weaves new forms of masculinities into old ones, offering resistance but also engendering acceptance. While ICT is integral to the functioning of the call centers, the work of its customer service agents typically does not require any technological prowess and the qualities required for the emergence and display of techno-masculinities. Yet, their expression of masculinities is affected by their interaction with technology and clients located in different cultures. If not hegemonic and not techno, what shapes and agentic expressions do these new masculinities offer?

What is common to both these situations, call centers and software firms, are the reversed flows of information from the global South to the North, the reversal of (or at least a dent in) the colonial relations of white and colored, and possibilities of reshaping the terms of interaction between the two.

Are they, as Poster (2013b) suggests, techno-masculinities and, in the case of the call center workers, a form of "techno-lite" masculinities given the difference in IT skills? Are these hyper-masculinities with exaggerated displays of technological prowess, or in the absence of such prowess, are these "fusion" masculinities: imbibing new patterns of practices from the interaction with the "other" in the West, fusing the old and the new, and retaining those practices that bolster power?

We argue that the different, often contradictory, masculinities are managed through a fusion of old and new, the fusing of masculinities as experienced in India and in Pakistan with those encountered through the transnational workplace. These "fusion masculinities" are temporal certainly but also selective as men choose what shapes and adds to their masculine self and ignore or reject other influences. As noted, "[m]asculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 851) and are subject to regional as well as global influences. Despite being situated firmly in the context

of capitalist patriarchy, these configurations, multilayered and contradictory, offer possibilities of change. Fusion masculinities then result from an enactment of work-role identities of a globalized workplace within the context of culturally appropriate and hegemonic masculinities that are in themselves shaped by local and regional social, economic, and political exigencies. Sometimes these new fusion masculinities contradict the contextually appropriate masculinities, sometimes they transcend gender norms, and oftentimes they reflect an attempt to accommodate, not challenge, such norms in an attempt to manage the stress of competing masculinities.

Intraorganization culture – formal and informal – reflects the hybridization that occurs when global and local meet. While encouraging women to join the ICT industry, adhering to strict anti-harassment policies, organizations also resort to "normalization" (disciplining behavior to fit gendered norms), "confinement" (Poster 2013b) and relegation of women IT professionals to routine tasks or "documentation," and being sensitive to local customs (restrictions on the external work, travel and late hours of female employees) (Poster 2008, 2013a). In principle at least, caste, an important indicator of place in life, is set aside in the interest of merit, and only those who have merit are hired and promoted. In reality, the IT industry is predominantly upper-caste Hindus, especially in the higher echelons, and their social and work group is also of a similar caste and class (Baas 2007).

The hybridization resulting from local-global interactions where techno-masculinities actually fuse traditional cultural norms with new, provides the space for fusion masculinities to emerge. Techno-masculinities facilitate the emergence of fusion masculinities, much as the call center emphasis on certain aspects of customer service sets the stage for the same.

Following the next section on methods, we use empirical data to illuminate this discussion, taking a closer look at the interactions between local, transnational, and global masculinities, and what emerges, in two sites in two countries of South Asia – countries that are uneasy neighbors with a history of wary relations, not quite enemies, not quite friends.

7.2 Methods

The empirical data used in this chapter is a result of research on international call centers conducted by the authors independently and separately of each other in India and Pakistan. The research strategy for each has some similarities: both interviewed employees and managers in selected international call centers observed the "production floor" where employees interact with each other and their clients and attended training seminars and joined the agents in the cafeteria during their breaks.

International call centers are uniquely suited to studying "identities in interaction" for a number of reasons. To begin with, call center work is quite standardized across countries. The employees work long hours with minimum breaks (in India and Pakistan, this entails long night shifts to match the workday in North America) and attend over 200 calls in a night. The work space is also similar with long rows of

workstations in drab, dimly lit halls. The workforce is quite young, ranging between 18 and 26 years of age, and often college educated. However, recruitment is primarily based on ability to speak English without a local accent or, even better, speak it with what is considered an American or British accent – thus education takes second seat, and call center employees with high school education earn at par with college and university graduates, sometimes even supervising them. These young people earn the same starting salary as their more educated peers in other jobs.[3]

7.2.1 *India*

In India, the research involved fieldwork, first in 1995 and 1996 with ethnographies of computer manufacturing and engineering firms, and interviews with eighty employees, managers, and officials of three call centers in the New Delhi area and suburbs in 2003 and 2004 and additional research between 2009 and 2012. The centers were selected through several informants: personal connections, suggested by the industry association and a government official. The selected call centers varied in size, ownership, and global positioning – BigCo, a multinational firm with about 3000 employees; MediumCo, a joint venture firm with an American company having about 200 employees; and SmallCo, an Indian-owned firm with forty employees. A total of 50 formal (semi-structured) interviews were conducted with calling agents, about 15 from each firm and a few from some additional firms for more breadth of comparison. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted about an hour. The employee lists provided by the human resource departments were used to select the sample with respondents chosen randomly, with balanced samples according to gender and occupational level. Two thirds of the sample is male, illustrative of the national distribution of employment. Most of the population is also young, highly educated, and urban.

More informal, unstructured interviews were also conducted: 20 interviews with human resource managers, quality control personnel, recruiters, trainers, nurses, and others and 15 interviews with industry experts, government officials, and employee associations. More recent data collection is drawn from newspapers, governmental reports, and international data archives.

7.2.2 *Pakistan*

In Pakistan, the research was carried out in two international call centers in two different cities. The cultural difference of the two cities was a factor in their selection. Callco was based in Islamabad, the capital city that draws its population from a mix of ethnicities and is less rigid in terms of gender norms than Lahore, the second site.

[3] Around $300–400 per month in Pakistan, lower in India; with sales commissions and bonuses, it translates into a good income for a fresh high school or college graduate.

Lahore, in the agricultural heartland of the country, retains its rural roots and adheres to more conservative gender norms. TechSol based in Lahore was part of an international group of call centers and, unlike Callco, owned by an individual based in the USA. Both served clients primarily in North America and a few in Europe. At the time of the research, both call centers had seen a decline in business, and downsized to less than 500 employees, because of the global economic downturn. Callco employs approximately 30% women, though more than 80% are short listed for vacancies; they do not take up job offers presumably because of the night shift requirements.

The research took place from 2008 to 2010 and included 67 interviews. Thirty-four interviews were conducted with female agents, 21 with men workers, and ten with families and husbands or fiancés of the women who had been interviewed. The purposive sample recruited participants primarily through snowball sampling and a few through fliers posted at the work sites. On average, the respondents were 24 years old with 14 years of schooling (in Pakistan the equivalent of a college degree) though quite a few had a master's degree or were enrolled in graduate classes. While salaries are low compared to international standards, the entry-level call center agent earns approximately $300–500 per month, quite generous compared to the national average.

Open-ended interviews around pre- and postemployment aspirations, role of family and kin, ideas about work and marriage, perceptions of working in a mixed environment (male and female colleagues), generated responses and conversations that provided valuable insights into the lives of the respondents. Interviews were often conducted in the cafeteria or a private space in the office premises as employees were reluctant to use their off-work time, used to catch up on sleep or housework and studies, and few women were able to meet outside of work premises, citing family constraints.

7.2.3 *Studying Up and Studying Down: Software Houses in India and Call Centers in Pakistan*

Comparing and contrasting changing masculinities at two levels of the ICT industry, in India and Pakistan, is not without irony, given the relations between the two countries and their different trajectories in the global ICT industry. Indians have had a different political and democratic history from Pakistan with strong social movements that engender a sense of self as Indians. Moreover, India's ascendancy in technology and as an emerging economy has placed it more firmly on the world stage as a country that will soon be in the top five economies of the world.

Since Pakistan gained its independence from British India in 1947, the relations between the two countries have fluctuated dramatically between an uneasy truce and war. The political rhetoric by the leaders from both countries offers an important insight into how masculinities are conceptualized in the region, with aggressive posturing suffused with religious overtones (India has a Hindu majority and Pakistan

has a Muslim majority) ignoring the common ties of a shared history, struggle for independence, and common language and culture along the north-west border of India with the eastern border of Pakistan.

The mosaic of masculinities within and between the two countries is not reflected in the political rhetoric of course; while it is difficult to capture or compare this diversity, there are some regional patterns that have shaped and influenced the "hegemonic" masculinity particular to the geographical north of the South Asia region (comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, North India, Nepal, and Bangladesh). Placed firmly within the "classical patriarchy" belt, the culture of these countries exhibits a strong son preference, where rights of women are socially and culturally subordinated to those of men irrespective of their legal standing, and a women's position in society is heavily dependent on that of her father and, after marriage, her husband, her fertility, and the number of sons she has. Masculinity here embodies the cultural ideal: men are expected to be protectors of women and defenders of family honor irrespective of age, to be breadwinners, to defer to parents and family elders, and to respect women who conform to the cultural ideal of femininity. Increasingly however these notions have been buffeted by the winds of change riding the newest wave of globalization. Women are entering the workforce often providing for men and families as jobs become vulnerable and wages lower, and young women and men are more informed than their elders thanks to the Internet and social media. Masculinities and femininities are being reshaped and reimagined across class and caste in both the countries, pushing the boundaries of sociopolitical acceptability.

Surprisingly, there are a number of commonalities across borders and across the two hierarchical levels of software developers and call center workers. Drawing out the common threads and identifying differences allow a comparison between local-local in South Asia and a comparison of work at the peripheries (the call centers) and the higher paid, valued knowledge work.

7.3 Findings and Analysis

7.3.1 Call Centers and Masculinities in Interaction

Call center work, unlike that of the high-end software engineers, is beset with contradictions for young male employees who are unable to exercise techno-masculinities to assert their position in the social hierarchy. Even though better paid than average workers, call center work is low status and often equated to that of telephone operators, not befitting a college graduate. Where work is at the bottom of the social scale and at the periphery, male workers use different strategies to frame the work as befitting of "a man" and not as feminized labor. The performativity of masculinity in these cases involves claims on the social space of the production floor as their own.

Managing the competing demands of workplace and social norms leads to interesting configurations of masculinities that are neither techno nor hegemonic but can best be termed "fusion." The tensions between the normative masculinity and the exigencies of the global workplace are further described below.

7.3.2 "We Cannot All Be Americans"

What is clear is that all the employees are very aware that their workplace is "American," in contrast to their geographical location. For example, a female engineer gushed, "the environment is very friendly. It is quite different from the other Indian companies. It is quite different from the other multinationals. It has a total freedom" (Poster 2013a, 13). Another engineer said: "Usually in Indian companies, men and women won't mix all together. They won't talk more than a 'Hello' or 'Hi'. They will hesitate to talk. But it is not the case here. They mix well" (Poster 2013a, 13). In these "global circuits of gender" (Poster 2013a), women and men engage without the normative cultural restrictions on their physical and social interactions. Similar sentiments were echoed by the customer service agents in the call center in Pakistan, especially the women who realized that as professionals one could be friends with someone from the opposite sex, without having to see it as a relationship beyond the workplace. But it was also tempered with a realization of cultural norms as evident from the comment by Jason (call center pseudonym):

> Although we are an American company but we are working in a Pakistani culture, we have to see things according to the culture we have, actually. We cannot go, I mean, to be very honest even... practically, we cannot be all American here, that's not possible.

Those who are unable to keep this distinction become "wannabes," and according to Jason, "[t]hey are stuck between two cultures, neither American nor Pakistani. I don't think that's right. You follow things," meaning one should observe the local culture and norms.

Part of the tension between perceptions of being local or "wannabes" also stems from the fact that call centers attract individuals from different social classes. While admittedly few, women and men from the upper middle class who have been to English medium, co-ed schools may behave differently from their lower middle-class colleagues who live more conservative lives and do not have exposure to nonfamily women and to different ways of behaving and dressing. For the men to include a woman in their list of friends or engage with her in off-floor conversations is to insinuate an interest in having a relationship.

7.3.3 The Ideal Man: Normative vs. Reality

Men are expected to be protectors, irrespective of age, and breadwinners, to defer to parents and family elders, and to respect the women who conform to social gender norms. Men understand this role only too well. Twenty-three-year-old Umair

(Pakistan) joined the call center when he was 19. As the eldest son in a family of five, the death of his father propelled him into the role of protector and breadwinner for his mother, two older sisters, and two brothers. Studying and working two jobs, he managed to save enough money to marry off his sisters in a befitting way, a fact he repeatedly mentions with pride.

Men face a dilemma in their protector/provider role when sisters and wives have to step out to work. For example, many of the women interviewed in Pakistan mentioned that brothers, both younger and older ones, put up a stiff resistance to their working and especially to working nights. The brothers saw it as problematic since a woman having to work is a direct reflection on their own inability to provide. And secondly, working nights is a major shift in norms where night work can easily be conflated with sex work. As protectors of their sister's honor, these men would have to bear the double burden of ensuring nothing happened to them and also silence the murmuring disapproval of extended family or community members. Twenty-two-year-old Amra narrated how it was her younger brother who had to be persuaded to let her work despite the dire financial straits of the family, once she explained that she would leave at dusk and come back early in the morning. Avoiding going to-and-fro in the dark of the night was important as neighbors would gossip and think of her, and the family, as "bad." Night shifts are also one reason that, unlike other countries where higher proportions of the call center workforce are women, in India and Pakistan this is not the case.

Working nights allows young people a measure of freedom away from the surveillance of family (especially in the case of young women) and an opportunity to meet with others from across the class and social stratum. Surveillance is not totally suspended, however, as organizations keep a tight rein on how time is utilized on the floor; in Pakistan some parents request managers to keep an eye on their daughters and not allow them to leave the premises or even their seats; this sometimes extends to young men as well.

Men are also perceived to be "emotionally stable" and "strong" unlike women who therefore have a secondary role in the relationship. Paradoxically, this means that men are not seen as partners and equals; for example, Nosheen states, "I don't like men who want to take the consent of their wives in each and every step they take," the assumption being that women give the wrong counsel, especially in matters of business. Despite working and supporting her family, Nosheen is not particularly enamored of women's role in domestic decision-making, possibly because such a role also entails taking responsibility.

At the same time, women see men as falling short on respecting female colleagues, referring to them as "typical Pakistani men," who lose no opportunity to try to score with the "girls." The ones they liked were "not the sort of guys you would think [of as] typical Pakistani guys – they are really cool and help you and, you know, try to understand, to be more friendly toward you," says Maha of her teammates, and not "looking at you and staring at you." So, while some were adhering to the role of protector, respecting women, etc., others were not.

The justification for such behavior is explained by the men who categorized their female colleagues as those who "needed" to work (family in financial straits with

male members either disabled or deceased or simply unable to provide) and those who came to get away from home and meet other people or to support a lifestyle that the family could not provide for. These latter "girls" were further classified as "respectable" if they adhered to the dress code, did not befriend male colleagues, barely spoke with anyone on the work floor, and so forth, and the "bad" ones who had befriended several of their male colleagues often went out with them for the "lunch hour" (at midnight) and wore "Western" clothes (trousers/jeans and short tops), styled their hair (Umair asks, "Why do you need to style your hair at night?"), and spoke with an American accent. In such cases, the men dropped their normative role, since they did not have to be particularly concerned about the "honor" of the "bad" women. Umair was of the view that it was easy to distinguish between the two and to assess if the female colleague was there because of necessity and need or working "just to get out of the house at night and has motives other than work." Ameer felt that they "like to be westernized and they feel sort of privilege to be one of them, which I personally think it's not right," echoing Faheem who thought "the journey from home begins with the *dopatta*[4] on the head, and in the call center it slips to just hang from the shoulders" or is cast off altogether.

However working alongside women does influence how the men behave. Usman says it is more difficult to swear or use inappropriate language (definitely a symbol of masculinity among young men of his age) and exchange off-color jokes. Others felt that working with women did not really make a difference, though in both India and Pakistan having a different work environment was noted.

7.3.4 *Skillful, Confident, and Earning*

Masculinities are established by focusing on the "skills" beyond just the English because one is assessed for "the aptitude actually, to take the stress, meet his goals, and then, you know, grow as well" (Jason). Another sales rep boasted how he "can talk to the topmost authority now" in a client's company since in his business-to-business calls he was "not going to talk to a secretary, a receptionist, or someone, I need to get to the topmost authority – you understand it's not easy to get to that person" (Ameer, TechSol Pakistan). Call center work generates confidence and skills Ameer brags, after having "spoken to millions of American people" to sell them something they did not particularly want or need. Despite his middle-class background, he is quick to distance himself from "the stiff necks" that some agents acquire "because they have posh accents, they can talk like Americans, and they can communicate with them in a proper way."

In both India and Pakistan call centers, workers used their knowledge, that is, the script and product training, to express astonishment at the American customers who have to be told "like little children how to put the phone, how to put the SIM card together" (Mirchandani 2008, 93). "Americans are dumb and rude," Canadians are

[4] Long scarf that often covers the head or lies across the shoulders.

"deaf and dumb," and "Brits" are "very strict" and stubborn, that is, once they have said, "no then it's [a] no."

Employees have a bachelor's degree and are often interfacing with customers who have less education than they have. This also leads to a sense of superiority, justifying the notion that Americans are dumb, with money but no brains (Poster 2007a, b; Mirchandani 2008).

Fathers of some of the interviewed men were not happy with the low status of call center jobs initially but then came around when it was presented as "working in a good corporate organization" (Raheel), meaning it is not a fly-by-night company. Americans are "frank, disciplined," have "accountability" work ethics, and are "fair" in their dealings. Jason is very appreciative of the space that the call center provides: "Even if you don't like American culture, you're still given space. You're given space to practice your religion; you're given space to practice your beliefs." American management is unlike *desi* (local/Pakistani) management – there is immediate and transparent decision-making; everyone is respected regardless of their position in the hierarchy (the opposite is the bane of workplace politics in the subcontinent where position in the hierarchy overshadows formal rules and policies).

Faheem brags that more families were interested in him as a prospective son-in-law because he works with a "multinational company," and the salary is good, especially when you log in "three hundred and twelve" working hours in the month instead of the expected one hundred and sixty and earn a bonus.

While better paid for the entry-level high school graduates, call center work is by no means a well-paid job for those with higher education. However, high unemployment and few work opportunities make international call centers an attractive option for men who are often primary or main earners in large extended families. Urban legends of the call center dream bonus of $1000 keep them focused. Almost every male employee interviewed recalled that one agent who had earned the legendary bonus within his first few months and so on, even though they had never met the man personally. One of the human resource managers admitted as much when he said that "the boys come in and want to work on the projects where they can make the (500–1000) bonus," but the "girls" take it "slow and steady, working for 2 years on one project before they move on to the higher ones" (Kamran, TechSol). The higher bonus is commensurate with higher stress and is regarded by both the women and men as being a male privilege since in their opinion few women would choose or have the capacity to manage the additional stress.

Confidence, ability to speak to the top tier, convincing sales calls; long hours and hefty bonuses, plus the call center pseudonyms Ryder, Tanner, and Brian; and the fake informal environment of the workplace – calling a boss by his first name instead of the customarily deferential "sir" – feature as one way that the male employees assert a certain brand of masculinity on the work floor.

Masculinities are also exercised through body language. Instead of sitting crouched over their headphones reading their script and conversing with customers in a soft voice, the "guys" walk up and down agitatedly, wave their hands in the air, and yell, "Yes," once the sale is clinched, and the call is transferred to the closer.

Shouts go up as a team meets its sales targets for the day. Their female colleagues just sit on their chairs and smile, but the men make the floor their own. If a sales call has not gone well, the phone is banged down, followed by choice expletives. If there is pressure to meet targets and the sales are slow, quick cigarette breaks are taken to ease the pressure; no such breaks for the women who just continue working, except the westernized ones who step out with the "boys" to the unofficially designated smoker's corner just outside the office. The drab gray or blue interiors with low lighting, rows upon rows of impersonal work stations, are converted into a battleground where the victims are the ones who failed their targets and the heroes are the ones who saved the team by working ferociously, making sale after sale. Announcement of their heroism is made over the speakers, a round of clapping commences, and their photograph flashes on the large TV screen for all to see. Work stops for a few seconds.

Male employees use their phone conversation to charm American and Canadian female customers, selling overpriced products. "Oftentimes we get women at night," as the men are away at work, says an agent, and "most of the time we have to flirt with them," or strike up a personal conversation, asking about their family and kids, and then weaving in a story about their own marriage and kids (even if single) because "You have to make them feel happy" (Daniel). Call center workers also indulge in emotion management for clients, helping them with tips and advice on resolving issues in their personal lives or just lending a sympathetic ear (Mirchandani 2008).

7.3.5 New Masculinities: Shaping the Old and Crafting the New

Strategies such as casting work as both professional and disciplined are used both in Indian (Mirchandani 2008) and Pakistani call centers. Dress and language, the mixing of women and men on the work floor, all are emphasized to set call center workers apart from their peer in the desi workplaces. Similarly, higher salaries are flaunted with high and visible consumption lifestyles, relative to their class and age – often eating out and having fancy mobile phones and credit cards.

Faced with often abusive and racist customers, Indian and Pakistani call center workers use strategies of education, class, and culture to resist, reversing the gaze and "othering" Americans as less educated, having money but no brains, and as people who are often lonely, without family.

As "cyber coolies" (Praful Bidwai, cited in Mirchandani 2004), these well-educated South Asians cater to the basic requirements of their Western customer. To manage this reality, their work is cast as professional requiring a high level of skills and assertiveness, marketing acumen, and is linked to perks such as transport to and from work, air-conditioned offices, and attractive salaries. This impression management of work is done by both employers and workers.

Call centers and international customer service centers also insist on location masking in both India and Pakistan, in order to assure the customer that the service provider is based in North America and is not a beneficiary of jobs that should not have been shipped overseas.

The call center employees learn how to put aside the cultural norms that they are proud of: respect to elders, due deference to age and position – because "if we do the same with US customers, you know, be extra careful, give a lot of respect while talking to them over the phone, they feel that this guy is not an American." In other words the customer can see through their call center pseudonym (Joe Ryder) and accent, and a potential sale is lost if the customer is irritated by it and believes that jobs have been taken away from Americans and outsourced to others. In such cases the hard work by management to "build a bridge between the two cultures," training their employees "about the American culture, how things work, what are the norms, what are the good things, what are the bad things, and what are the critical aspects of the American culture they have to be careful about," is jeopardized (Manager, Callco).

Yet, masculinities are practiced within the norms set by family and society. For example, Bill Ryan (call center pseudonym) was accompanied by his father for his first interview at TechSol and was allowed to work "because he trusts me," despite the belief that "a person can do anything at night." The parents of another young man would call him up the moment his shift ended and remind him to come straight home, as he was not allowed to go out with friends after work. Often the men noted how having women in the workplace meant that they had to be careful not to use rough language and to be careful about what they say.

Being high earners at a young age (true for call center workers as well as those doing higher-end technical work) brings a pride and confidence that is reflected also in their demand as eligible suitors. Marrying colleagues is not unknown, but by all accounts, arranged or approved marriages still predominate. Poster (2007b) notes that the coming together of recruits from different class and caste backgrounds in the IT sector, and the weakened parental control, has led to an increase in marriages across these otherwise rigid social boundaries.

In an insightful piece, Michiel Baas (2007) terms this phenomenon in the IT industry as "arranged love marriage." Despite getting acquainted through the workplace, most couples strive to get parental approval before committing to the marriage. For those at higher-end work, it is also a considered bargain as both partners work in the same industry and are likely to have higher combined incomes.

> It is not a question of following your heart, but following your path: a path that leads to promotion within the IT industry and, of course, more money which both families and their respective communities will profit from as well. And for that reason, a new caste is born, one with its own set of rules and rituals. (Baas 2007, 9)

The new masculinities, then, do not necessarily defer entirely to parents and social customs, but rather the "good son" role is adapted to include personal and parental preferences. The social compatibility has shifted from a class/caste emphasis to one of belonging to the same world of work (Baas (2007).

While the co-ed environment at the call center is friendly, a number of male respondents in Pakistan did not greet their female coworkers if they bumped into them outside of the call center, for example, shopping with their family. Women appreciated the nod to gender norms implicit in this action, recognizing it as respecting the segregation mandated by society; otherwise, the consequences could be disastrous, including having to quit work.

For some men, working with women allowed them to put aside the negative stereotyping of women working at night and to see them as hardworking individuals who were supporting families. Men also accepted that women should have the option to work just not during the night. Most of the men interviewed insisted that they had no objection to their wives working, but since they were providing enough, there was no need for her to work and besides, "she is working at home." There is a struggle to reconcile the provider role with the new imperatives where a good, high consumption lifestyle requires two earners, and the argument of "only if I cannot provide" is wearing thin.

For those young men who are more conservative, the idea that women should be able to work as a matter of choice is becoming acceptable, albeit very slowly. This realization is subject to "need," that is, women's work outside the home is regarded as an extension of her filial responsibility of taking care of her family in times of economic stress. Her primary work is inside the home, and taking on the double burden of work outside of it is tolerated as long as it does not disturb the putative harmony within the household. Waqar in Pakistan sums it up; thus:

> Callco is very healthy place to work for girls and boys. You can see here the environment is quite open – girls are coming and going freely – but if you ask me Pakistan is not America – the culture here is changing. I belong to a very conservative family. There are limited work opportunities for us, much less so for women. Apart from that, I think need is the biggest factor [for women] to leave the house in search of work.

At the same time, in response to a question on whether decisions are made in consultation with his wife, he says: "Yes, of course. Even in Islam it is said that you must consult even for the little things." He finds that the new and different environment of the call center lets him practice traditional values but also releases him from certain cultural constraints; it encourages boldness rather than blind deference, but, he insists "values should [remain] with you – one should be both, a little bit conservative and a little bit modern."

And that in a nutshell is why these new masculinities are "fusion" masculinities – retaining aspects of the old while fusing them with new notions acquired through their Americanized, global workplace.

7.3.6 *Fusion Masculinities and the Transnational Workplace*

Fusion masculinities emerge even as call center workers in both India and Pakistan remain ever conscious of their own geopolitical status. If one is not fluent in English and cannot sustain the conversation beyond a few scripted lines, then there is the

danger of the North American customer discovering that there is a Pakistani on the other end of the line (even if it is an Indian), and the call is immediately disconnected because "terrorism comes to mind," as Pakistani is synonymous with terrorism in the minds of most North American customers. Sometimes one can get away with being an Indian because "American society is multicultural," but not Pakistani. These customer service agents are quite aware of the impact of the "war on terror" has had, notwithstanding Pakistan's status as a US ally with blowback from this status on their own environment. Working in an American company that has no sex segregation, where one can "still see girls clad in jeans" (Jason) can have fearful consequences, as one can become potential target for extremists and ultra-right-wing groups. It is indeed ironical that their American customers might see them as terrorists, while groups within their own country may see them as too American or America friendly and therefore betraying culture and religion. Employees feel caught between the two positions. As Jason in Pakistan notes:

> These call centers and software houses have increased per capita income [...], have given an opportunity to those who didn't have it earlier [...]. The world is a lot bigger and brighter than Pakistan is, to be very honest. We have achieved a lot but this is nothing, India is the largest exporter of the software in the whole world.

There is recognition of India as a global leader of savvy Indian media and government policies that promote "shining India."

The environment of the global workplace (especially call centers) – with the American-accented English, Western pseudonyms, generous salaries, and hefty bonuses – creates new identities. Working for a multinational company and for American bosses; calling everyone by their first name, no "sirs"; having money to spend; celebrating birthdays, valentines, and Christmas; and working with women and with Christians, Hindus, and diverse social castes in an environment of tolerance and diversity present a kaleidoscope of bewildering experiences to these young people that collides and meshes with their local identities and notions of masculinities – as Indian; Pakistani; Muslim; Hindu; provider/protector; respecter of social norms, for example, obedience and deference for elders; sympathetic to helpless women especially the elderly; etc.

Simultaneously, the call center workers, though not the technology elite, are not seen as very successful since their education and job are unlikely to speed their journey up the social ladder beyond a few rungs.

How do the men resolve it? By fusing both their global and local lived realities. The emergent fusion masculinities can, for example, extend the protector role to elderly and single mothers in the USA. They can use their multinational employee status and salary to display pride and lifestyle in India and Pakistan. They can acknowledge working women, but implicitly see them as a challenge to their own status as providers and the benefits they reap from women's unpaid reproductive labor (e.g., from the unpaid household manager-wife). This is visible in the perspectives of the call center men when they express support for women working and are appreciative of their colleagues, but as they move back into their private space of home, they would not support wives/sisters working as it affects their role as providers.

These new fusion masculinities are transgressive of old gender norms but are not regressive. They are subtly changing the balance in gender relations to a more equitable one and are challenging the dominance of the global North while simultaneously forging partnerships with it. Fusion masculinities embrace the new, discarding portions of the old that hinder their progress in local and/or global spheres.

7.4 Discussion

Masculinities are shaped not just by their immersion in the global ICT industry, but they are also influenced by the broader sociopolitical contexts. This includes, on the one hand, historic tensions between Pakistan and India (friendly cricket rivalry notwithstanding!)[5] and, on the other hand, relations with the "West," especially for Pakistan with the decade-long "war on terror." A constant barrage of mostly negative stereotyping of Pakistan and Pakistanis creates an environment different from that of India where India-US relations are ascendant. What is different in the two country contexts is the level of ambivalence felt by workers in Pakistan, as it is dubbed a den of terrorists. As far as US policy goes, young men under the age of 35 are seen as "potential combatants." For a decade now, newspapers and TV newscasts in Pakistan are filled with debates about drones, about the arbitrariness of American foreign policy (and here Soviet occupied Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Palestine figure prominently), about whether this is a "crusade," about whether the Taliban are simply trying to assert social justice via religion, and so on and so forth. This discourse may well influence how the young male call center employees working in an American company interact with North American customers in such an environment. Do they resent their customers? Or do they see them as separate from the foreign policy of their governments, even when they understand that most American customers might see them as "terrorists"; hence, location masking is important. The latter is quite plausible, since even the most patriotic Pakistani can be quite vocal in criticizing their own government and do not always see its policies as manifesting the will of the people. Or they may just separate their work-selves from their life outside of work, segregating the two "cultures" of workplace and public home life.

The notion of "fusion masculinities" presented in this chapter draws on the rich literature on the subject that has underscored the fluid nature of masculinities. Believing that masculinities are "configurations of practice" that can differ across social contexts, we argue, as other international researchers have done (cited in Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), that patterns of masculinity "are crosscut by other social divisions and are constantly renegotiated in everyday life" (Connell and

[5] The seriousness with which this is taken in the two countries is evident from the suspension and expulsion of over a dozen university students in Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir, who dared to celebrate the victory of the Pakistan cricket team over the Indian team in a match in Dubai in March 2014.

Messerschmidt 2005, 835). This does not imply the total absence of what is termed as hegemonic masculinity rather that it is not a constant static form. Such forms are found embedded in organizations, in families, and other social institutions.

The concept of fusion masculinities is supported by the notion that men can adopt, change, and take certain positions through their discursive practices and that it is this positioning that is termed as masculinity, rather than a particular type of man (Wetherell and Edley [1999], cited in Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 841).

It is similar to techno-masculinity in part because of some of its discursive practices but does not depend only on technological prowess. Instead, manipulating their work, context, and culture, men adopt and meld discursive positions strategically to achieve the balance that works best for them.

7.4.1 Limitations

Small qualitative studies are not generalizable, but direct attention to how the interactions between young employees and clients and with a nontraditional work environment can change perceptions. More ethnographic, longitudinal, studies would be useful, as would others that focus more on how shifting masculinities impact gender relations. While the backdrop to this chapter is globalization with all its contradictions, the focus is on the shifting masculinities triggered by specific processes of globalization and not on the merits, demerits, or features of globalization per se; nor does the chapter dwell upon the interplay of changing masculinities and femininities and how gender relations are shaped as a result of shifting masculinities, though it does allude to them. Finally the chapter points to the position of India and Pakistan as the two Hindu majority and Muslim majority countries, respectively, that are on two sides of the US foreign policy and is not meant to provide a detailed background of the historical and political differences between the two.

7.5 Conclusion

The preceding sections weave a complex tapestry of gender relations in the context of complex global relations, analyzed through a focus on masculinities. We conclude with our initial questions. What is the shape of the competing masculinities within the industry as workers position themselves against the global North, between those in the industry and outside of it and between those at different levels of industrial hierarchy? How do these masculinities engage with, shape, and are shaped by, the global? Are these regressive, transgressive, or both? While there is no definitive answer, we find that fusion masculinities adopt aspects of hegemonic masculinity, but incorporate alternatives, drawing on the local, historical, and political, and remain fluid as they move between the global and the local and the personal and the professional.

Drawing on the social constructionist approach of "doing gender," this article attempts to shed light on the discursive practices of "doing masculinities" by drawing on research in India and Pakistan with software engineers and workers in the international call centers. Specifically the analysis and discussion focus on the construction of masculinities through interaction with "others" juxtaposed with the local constructions.

Standing at the intersection of technology culture and politics, these men understand the exigencies of their workplace while balancing the competing expectations of their geographical and social location. The deft manipulation of both allows them to fuse those practices of masculinities into configurations that work to their advantage in interactions with the global and in interactions with the local. The resulting fusion masculinities are accepted both in their professional and their personal lives.

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