

# Equality on His Terms: Doing and Undoing Gender through Men's Discussion Groups

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First Published June 21, 2018 | Research Article



<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218779779>

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## Abstract

Efforts to promote gender equality often encourage changes to interpersonal interactions as a way of undermining gender hierarchy. Such programs are premised on the idea that the gender system can be “undone” when individuals behave in ways that challenge prevailing gender norms. However, scholars know little about whether and under what conditions real changes to the gender system can result from changed behaviors. We use the context of a gender sensitization program in the Democratic Republic of Congo to examine prospects for transformative change at the interactional level of the gender system. Over nine months, we observed significant changes in men's quotidian practices. Further, we identified a new commitment among many men to a more equal division of household labor. However, participants consistently undermined the transformative potential of these behavioral changes through their dedication to maintaining control over the objective, process, and meaning of change, resisting conceptions of equality that challenged the gender system. Because quotidian changes left gender hierarchy intact, they appear unlikely to destabilize the logics that legitimate women's subordination.