

Transforming Masculinities: A Qualitative Study of A Transformative Education Programme for Young Zulu Men and Boys in Rural Kwazulu-Natal

by

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Abstract

A growing number of innovative gender transformative programmes targeting men and boys are currently being developed across Africa south of the Sahara. One such initiative is the Khanyisa programme in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa which utilises the concept of Ubuntu as a lens to explore subjects such as masculinity, inequality, gender, violence and HIV/AIDS. Based upon original qualitative research which follows a Khanyisa group of eight young men over a 12 month period, this paper examines the use of indigenous knowledge approaches to transformative education in relation to masculinities. Focusing through transformative learning theory, this paper then explores how socio-cultural processes construct societal patterns of masculine domination and related individual masculine identities, and examines the use of gender transformative programmes towards the reconstruction of new, more equitable gender identities.

Data collected through focus groups, semi structured interviews, subjective outcome evaluation and a diary project was interpreted using thematic analysis. The research shows the programme to produce a reduction in gender based violence and risk taking and an increase in self-esteem, communication and domestic and parental responsibility. Culturally appropriate pedagogies are found to be central to successful interventions, and a learning cycle which supports the internalisation of new, more equitable masculine schemas has been developed. In order to avoid social pressure to revert to default communal gender norms post intervention, the paper suggests adopting a 'whole community' approach to transforming societal gender systems into more equitable models.

Introduction

South Africa has the worst known figures for gender-based violence for a country not at war, with at least one in three South African women being raped in their lifetime (Moffett, 2006), with young men being the main perpetrators of this violence. In an attempt to address masculine domination and support men to examine and transform distorted masculinities, there is a growing body of work concerning involvement of men in family planning and reproductive health, fatherhood, gender based violence and HIV and AIDS (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 2007). There are also now a number of Africa specific gender policies and commitments to working with men such as ‘The African Charter on Human Rights and People’s Rights’, the Maputo protocol ratified in 2005 and the Southern African development community (SADC) gender protocol (Stern et al, 2009), and alongside these a number of new, innovative programmes targeting men and boys in Africa south of the Sahara (John Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa & Sonke Gender Justice, 2010).

It is within this context that the Khanyisa programme (York & Mlibeni, 2012) has been created and developed. Khanyisa is an initiative of the Khuphuka Project in rural KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Khuphuka (literally meaning ‘to rise up’ in isiZulu) works at the epicenter of the AIDS pandemic, adopting a community development approach to the provision of primary healthcare services, orphaned and vulnerable child protection, youth work, information and advocacy services and food security. The organization observed that the young men of the community were not engaging in health promotion/education interventions whilst as a group simultaneously exhibiting the highest incidence of risk behaviours, and as a response developed the Khanyisa programme (literally meaning ‘to enlighten’ in isiZulu). Khanyisa is a transformative education project working with young Zulu men and boys (aged 15-25) from the premise that masculine identities can be explored and understood, and are open to change. Khanyisa facilitate a one year programme of workshops with groups of young men in wilderness settings, partnering with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife at the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park. The focus of the workshops is Ubuntu, the Southern African concept of interdependence- that we can only be human in relation to others, and that through knowing this deeply, it becomes natural to care for and be of service to others. Using Ubuntu as a core theme, the leaders facilitate exercises which explore subjects such as masculinity, inequality, gender, violence and HIV/AIDS with an emphasis upon personal and group reflection and transformation.

Given the complexity of the sociocultural structures that young Zulu (and other South African) men are born into, and the apparent tensions between so called ‘traditional’ masculinities and gender equality, a model which utilises a universally accepted ‘traditional’ concept such as Ubuntu as a framework for an ethical investigation into the processes that reproduce male domination deserves further investigation. This study examines the experience of a group of young men and boys who participated in a 12 month Khanyisa programme, and thus, explores the programme methodology and its challenges, and suggests what contribution such an approach can make in transforming gender identities and achieving gender equality.

Transformative Education and an Indigenous Knowledge Approach

The emergence of transformative learning theory has been an increasing focus for researchers and is based upon several assumptions about learning and adulthood. First, adults (including young adults) are active, not passive, participants in their lives and are instinctively driven to make meaning of their world. Second, rooted in the tenets of constructivism, adults have significant life experience and this rich personal experience is what provides the basis for an established belief system (Taylor et al, 2012). It is through this established belief system that adults construct meaning of what happens in their lives. Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construct a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action (Ibid). Core elements include individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, and engaging in other ways of knowing and awareness of context (Taylor, 2009).

Cornu (2005:177) proposes that the process of reflection must be understood as the gradual transformation of knowledge into knowing, and part of that transformation involves a deepening internalisation to the point that people and their 'knowing' are totally integrated one with the other. In terms of this study, this process of internalisation is central to the transformation of gender identity. Jarvis (1995) sees experience as a type of pivot between individuals and their environment, so that learning becomes a process of internalisation as they transform and make sense of this interaction. Jarvis understands culture and society to be human constructions, outcomes of the learning process which involves people internalising elements of their external world, but then externalising them through their subsequent action in and on this world.

Jack Mezirow (2000:17-18), a leader in the field of transformative education, uses the notion of a 'frame of reference' to describe the structure of assumptions and expectations, including unconscious cultural assumptions, through which we filter sense impressions. This frame of reference has two dimensions: 'habits of mind' which are the broadly based assumptions that act as a filter for experience including social norms and morality, religion, world view etc. and the 'resulting points of view' which include our attitudes, beliefs and judgments which are often challenged through the transformative process, hence:

'Transformative learning refers to the processes by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight' (Ibid: 7-8).

Mezirow's approach to transformative learning, whilst being widely acknowledged as effective, has also been criticised by Ntseane (2011) as reflecting a Western hemispheric bias with an emphasis on the individual as the unit of analysis and a lack of attention for the sociocultural contexts that shape learning.

She suggests an enhancement in its efficacy if applied to be culturally sensitive. Belenkey and Stanton (2000) also raise concern that Mezirow does not fully take into account the power differentials which impact upon opportunities for learning, and that facilitators need to understand that different groups require different approaches to learning. Harris (2007) argues that this inequality of power is even more relevant in the global south, where often no formal education has been received by an individual. An Afro-centric perspective of transformative learning has also begun to take shape (Asante, 1998; Taylor 2008). Ntseane and Chilisa (2012:82) explore an Indigenous Knowledge approach to learning from an 'African context', finding a bias towards learning through 'cultural institutions, proverbs, spirituality, participatory approaches and experiential learning'. In unity, the Khanyisa Programme's use of the indigenous South African concept of *Ubuntu* as its central thread with relevancy to African culture.

The Concept of Ubuntu

Kingsley (2010) cites the *Nguini* proverb '*Umuntu ngu-umuntu ngobantu*' meaning 'I am because we are' and claims that it expresses the true meaning of African social existence, creating a unified and interconnected conception of human existence. He describes this sense of collective solidarity characterizing *Ubuntu* through love, caring, tolerance, respect, empathy, accountability and responsibility. Kingsley argues that a total rejection of African heritage within education will leave African societies in a vacuum that can only be filled with confusion, loss of identity and a total break in integral communication. Nobles (1986) explains how the imposition of Eurocentric ideas both currently and historically have inhibited Africans from understanding African reality, resulting in 'conceptual incarceration'. Harris (2007) concludes that to be most effective, informal education should be carried out in a culturally sensitive manner responsive to the distinct learning patterns of specific social groups, using methods which avoid imposing education 'from above' and working from within the culture of the group. Alasuutari (2011) agrees that without an understanding of the history of unequal dialogue and power relations within development practice, interventions will continue to result in surface level encounters with the 'other' and in notions of supremacy and the universality of Western/Northern hemispheric ways of seeing and knowing. Ensuring that change develops within the existing cultural context of a group seems essential for any sustainability.

There is also criticism of the use of *Ubuntu* in education. Enslin & Horsthemke (2004) claim that the argument for *Ubuntu* is weakened by the staggering incidence in Africa south of the Sahara of genocide, dictatorships and autocratic rule, corruption, sexism and practices like clitoridectomy, heterosexualism and homophobia. It is however impossible to separate the social challenges facing parts of Africa from the impact of enslavement, colonialism and global capitalism. And furthermore, Kandirikirira (2002) in a study of a Namibian community found that apartheid had damaged the very core of society, destroying family units, fragmenting communities, undermining indigenous value systems and distorting masculine identities.

Masculinities

There is now a growing body of research which suggests that ideals of masculinities that emphasize male dominance and relationship control are harmful for both men's and women's health and wellbeing (WHO 2010). Research finds that men who adhere to dominant masculine norms are more likely to be controlling of their partners and engage in high-risk sex, often enacting physical and sexual violence upon their female partners (Santana et al. 2006). They are also found to have worse mental health and general well-being (O'Neil 2008). Many of these dominant masculinities are dependent upon the internalisation of a range of emotions and their redirection into anger. Kaufman (2013) argues that it is not simply a case that men's emotional literacy is muted or their capacity for empathy underdeveloped, but that a range of natural emotions have been completely ruled off limits and invalid.

Researchers studying the related fields of HIV and violence have taken a growing interest in gender inequalities in South Africa, leading to a new focus on masculinities in the past five years (Dworkin, Colvin, Hatcher and Peacock 2012; Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger 2012). In reality though, the majority of HIV and anti-violence programming in South Africa still targets women, with fewer programs focusing upon men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) such as the Khanyisa Programme focus of this study. There is now a growing interest in programs which are gender transformative and aim to change gender roles, creating more respectful relationships, and impacting positively upon gender equality in relationships and on health (Gupta 2001; Barker et al, 2010). Barker and Ricardo (2005) argue that health-seeking behaviours, nonviolence, and gender equitable relationships can all be nurtured and enhanced when men are supported in their effort to have a high degree of self-reflection and space to rehearse new ideas and behaviours.

Masculine Domination

An analysis of transformative education approaches towards masculinities can usefully be complemented by examining Bourdieu's theory of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2001a), and in particular, his use of 'cultural production' (Bourdieu, 2001b) as a conceptual framework for understanding how social inequality manifests and becomes constant in social life. Bourdieu takes a hermeneutic approach to the relationship between self, material society and experience in the formulation and circulation of discourse. Masculine domination is embodied in languages, texts, knowledge, policies and human practices, and thus, these forms of domination are naturalized to such an extent that they become unconscious and sometimes unrecognizable (Dillabough, 2004).

Bourdieu's key concept of habitus can be described as a system of lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action (Grenfell, 2008). An individual develops these dispositions in response to the environment that she/he encounters, absorbing objective social structures into subjective mental experience.

Once the objective social structure has been fully internalised as an individual's personal core beliefs and values, a doxic relationship emerges and these core beliefs and values then reproduce the objective structures of the social field in a complex, and co-emerging contingent process. This cultural production generates and regulates the norms of a society or community, and is therefore central to the perpetuation of masculine domination as a natural, self-evident universal. Understanding how such systems are produced is essential in the process of deconstructing them, and in the reconstruction of more gender equitable systems. As Bourdieu (2001b:74) explains:

'The social world is something which agents make at every moment; but they have no chance of un-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and of what they can do to it by virtue of the position they occupy in it'.

Methodology

This study was conducted at the end of a year-long Khanyisa programme through a group of 8 young Zulu men (aged 18-24) from the deep rural community of Mqatsheni, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa that participated in 4 separate 3 day camping workshops in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park. Over the 12 month period, the facilitators took the young men through a series of experiential learning exercises which covered trust building, Ubuntu, gender and social/cultural expectations, HIV and gender, gender and power, violence, attitudes to rape, tests of courage and the modelling of new kinds of courage. The concept of Ubuntu was used as a reference point throughout the process to ensure that the exploration was occurring within a culturally appropriate framework. The aim was not to teach the young men new information, but to encourage reflection and critical thinking from the participants themselves, in order to create an environment where actual internal and collective shifts of perception and values could occur, and new schemas could be formed. This process was supported through encouraging the group to meet between sessions, providing opportunities to engage in voluntary work within the community, and the use of qualitative diaries as a personal record of their journey.

The study is primarily concerned with examining the outcomes of this particular intervention upon the gender identities of participants, and subsequent effects within their community, and a secondary interest in what could be learned to inform the use of culturally appropriate transformative education approaches to masculinities on a wider scale. This puzzle was explored through the following set of research questions:

- What kinds of outcomes are resulting from applying a transformative education approach to masculinity?
- What factors contribute to the construction of distorted masculine identities?
- What kinds of transformation does this approach produce in the gender identities of young male participants?

- What can combining approaches drawn from local cultures (in this case the philosophy of Ubuntu) add to a Western hemispheric education approach for Southern hemispheric populations?
- What are the barriers to transformation when using this approach?

The research took place primarily over a 3 day workshop which marked the end of the 1 year Khanyisa programme of which the 8 young men were the participants. Further research was conducted in the Mqatsheni community over a 10 day period following the workshop. For the purpose of this study, the researcher was both a participant and an observer, fully disclosing his role as researcher to the group (Punch, 2005). The time limitations of the fieldwork necessitated ethnographic observation to be a complementary method only. Focus groups were used to identify dominant group discourses and also to gauge differences between the group at the field study stage in comparison to the baseline focus groups held at the beginning of the programme, providing a measure against changes in values, beliefs and understanding within the group over the one year period. The three focus groups had good participation (8 participants in each), lasting from 50 to 90 minutes.

11 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Themes explored included the use of Ubuntu, masculinities, the Khanyisa methodology, self-reported transformation and the social impact of the intervention. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in iSiZulu and translated and transcribed into English. Interviews with 3 participant family members were also conducted as a complementary account of participant experience/transformation to compare with self-reported experience. The specific nature of the study necessitated the purposive sample group.

A central challenge posed by this particular study and the research questions was that of the concept of individual transformation, and how to measure such transformation over time. With this in mind it was decided to include a 'diary project' methodology as is currently being developed within a South African context by Penelope Plowman (2010). Personal qualitative diaries were utilized throughout the initial one year pilot programme, and data was used to explore change and also to identify themes for further exploration through the semi-structured interviews and focus groups at the fieldwork stage. Subjective outcome evaluation data (Siu et al, 2010) from focus group records and self-reporting questionnaires was also reviewed. This data added to the ability to identify themes, and also allowed for the identification of changes experienced within the group in a sequential way.

Initially, the data collected through the multiple methods was transcribed and analysed using a process of thematic analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Grbich, 1999). These themes were then explored through uncovering narratives to further express their meaning, giving more depth and a richness of understanding. A draft of the findings was subjected to a member-checking process involving the research assistants to promote rigour and ensure that the interpretation of data had credibility and trustworthiness (Rice and Ezny, 2005).

Limitations

This has been a small study involving participants from a specific community in rural KwaZulu Natal that examined what might be common experiences for many young South African men, but in a specifically rural local context. The findings of this study then, by their nature, have produced insights about particular situations, some of which might not be transferable beyond a local context.

Ethical Issues

This study has been given ethical clearance by the School of Development Studies Ethics Committee at the University of East Anglia. For those who wished to participate in the research study a consent form was provided. All information sheets were also read to participants in iSiZulu in case of literacy needs. Only the researcher had access to the original personal information of the research participants. A female research assistant was trained to work alongside the male lead researcher for interviews with female respondents, and was also available to conduct the interview alone if requested, in order to address potential gender dynamics limiting the freedom of female respondents to fully participate in this study.

Themes & Discussion: ‘Traditional’ Masculinities in South Africa

This study suggests that the perceptions of gender roles and relations held by the young men and boys involved in the study prior to engagement with the Khanyisa programme were based within a schema of male domination. Respondents reported engaging in sexually exploitative and violent relationships with often multiple partners alongside male on male violence, substance misuse and other criminal behaviour. Prior to engaging in the Khanyisa work the perception held within the group of what the male role involved was one of asserting authority over women, maintaining an image of strength within the home, and using violent means as considered necessary. Perceptions of the female role included sole parenting responsibility, performing all household duties, providing sex on demand and obeying the dominant men in the household/community. One common practice was that of women kneeling down when presenting food to the men in a household as a show of submission.

Although there are multiple factors leading to the construction and maintenance of such systems of domination, this study clearly points towards one as being a correlation between distorted masculinities and the devastating effects of the apartheid system upon societal, psychological and domestic life. One participant in the study explained:

‘What happened? I think it’s an apartheid thing. Everyone is fighting, they are using physical force. Now we must return to using the mind, not force. With apartheid if you were killing people it was nothing, it’s like you were killing an animal. People must change now, take care of each other’ (I).

A tangible experience of collective trauma was evident within the community. Such a reality reflects other studies which have been undertaken in this area. Kandirikirira (2002: 112) through a study of the Omaheke community in Namibia found that the profound impact of apartheid had 'damaged the very core of society, rupturing families, dispersing and fragmenting communities, undermining indigenous value systems and racialising every aspect of life'. Similarly, Kobi Kambon describes how in a racial-cultural context where an alien/European worldview dominates the socio-cultural reality of Africans, the natural socialisation processes underpinning 'African Self Consciousness' (awareness of one's collective African identity) can be weakened and distorted (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010:97). He argues that a 'Cultural Misorientation' results from the transition from degraded African worldview to the internalization of an alien/European worldview, leading to shifts in the core psychological orientation of African personality and subsequent maladaptive and psychologically disordered functioning including depression, anti-social drug use and violence.

Moffett (2006) describes how narratives about rape continue to be rewritten as stories about race, rather than gender, and how this demonises black men. She argues that contemporary sexual violence in South Africa is fuelled by justificatory narratives that are rooted in apartheid practices that legitimated violence by the dominant group against the disempowered, not only in the political arena, but in social, informal and domestic spaces. Another participant in the study reported that:

'If the money he earns is not enough to support his family then the man will feel that he is a failure because of the expectations of the community and his family for him to provide' (C).

All young men in this study expressed a strong experience of shame connected to not fulfilling their role as men within the community, in particular being unable to provide financial assistance to their families due to the almost complete lack of paid employment in their deep rural area. Throughout Africa south of the Sahara, during and since the colonial era, men's central role has been re-defined as breadwinner, but widespread unemployment and dwindling resources have made it impossible for most men to fulfil this role (Silberschmidt, 1999). The results have included male alcoholism, high incidence of rape, and often violent gender relations. In contrast, women's main role as daily household and farm manager has remained much closer to traditional female roles. Thus Silberschmidt would argue that women present as better able than men to achieve the social values embedded in their gender roles and societal expectations of them and that men are in this sense more threatened by societal changes than women.

The research participants spoke frequently of both frustration and confusion as to their gender roles within the community. There was a sense of stasis as the social structures of the community inhibited their ability to model values and beliefs which might feel more self-congruent and more likely to lead to improvements in gender equity and a reduction in the violence they were pressured to exhibit. The young men had been forced to suppress such feelings in order to conform to the dominant norms within the communal field, causing further internalised trauma. Such fracturing within a community and within the psychology of its young men necessarily requires a depth of deconstruction, exploration, honesty and courage to heal.

Transforming Masculinities

There were a number of very clear and encouraging outcomes from the study which point towards the usefulness of a transformative education approach to masculinities. The study shows a significant transformation in the perception of gender roles from pre to post intervention, moving from that of male domination and female inferiority to a more equality based, democratic view (see figures 1 & 2).

Figure 1: Data from focus groups exploring ‘What is the role of a man?’

Before participation in pilot programme	At end of year pilot programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own a house • Married • Own a car • Bread winner • Have the last word at home • Drink alcohol • To have your own chair/place in the home • Don't smile • Do home maintenance • Control your women/ don't listen to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share housework with your wife-cooking/cleaning • Listen to your partners opinion • To look after the kids when the women are not around • To buy groceries • Communicate with everyone else in the home • To share jokes

Figure 2. Data from focus group exploring ‘What is the role of a woman?’

Before participation in pilot programme	At end of year pilot programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give birth • Have sex • Respect their man • Do all the housework (clean/wash and cook) • No further education • Be at home • Look after the kids • To kneel down when you give the man food • Buy groceries • Listen to your man 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car owner • To be employed • To ‘have a say’ • To share her ideas in the family • To own a home • To have leisure time to exercise/play sport • To propose (marriage) • To fetch cattle • To have the right to say no

A number of respondents reported a reduction in violence, and spoke of developing communication with partners in order to deal with problems non-violently. Two young men expressed that:

‘... it has helped me to be a part of Khanyisa because even the way I think about women has changed. I used to be a very violent person towards my partner and that has changed now. It has also saved me because who knows; maybe I was going to end up in jail’ (D), and ‘now if I have a conflict with my partner, I want to resolve it peacefully through talking, not through violence’ (B).

A reduction in risk-taking behaviour was also expressed, particularly in relation to sexual behaviour, with men reporting an increase in condom use as a result of the programme:

‘I now have protected sex. I used to be ashamed of using condoms and having protected sex but now I have protected sex and I’m not ashamed of using condoms and I always carry them around with me’ (A).

The young men reported that risk taking was a way of proving yourself as a man within your peer group. They explained that although many of them had been reluctant to engage in certain risk taking behaviours, any attempt to deviate from the communal expectations was met with strong disapproval, leading to feelings of personal shame compounded by a resultant family shame.

Through engagement in the Khanyisa programme, the young men had been able to deconstruct such expectations within a group of peers, presenting the opportunity of experimenting with new values and beliefs and over time internalising schemas which better reflected their deeper notions of how to relate in the world. The Director of the local community development project noted that 3 of the 7 participants had disengaged with school at an early age, and had been engaging in far more risk behaviours within the community including violence, crime and substance misuse. He also noted that these young men would never hear the standard youth campaigns delivered through schools and said that Khanyisa had been a lifeline for them. He felt that this approach offered an effective method for reaching the most excluded and vulnerable.

The development of increased self-esteem and confidence was also reported, with respondents speaking of this building hope and a belief that a positive future was indeed possible. Again, these new points of view and attitudes can be seen to have been produced through the internalisation of new habits of mind through personal and group reflection outside of the usual dominant social structures. The sense of positivity can be seen as a result of the release of unconscious tensions caused by the constant re-processing of accepted cultural norms at the expense of conflicting self-congruent attitudes and beliefs, one young man describing that:

'I feel that by being a part of Khanyisa I have grown in self-esteem. Now with some of the things I would like to do in my life, I have the confidence to do them' (C).

This new sense of confidence and energy seemed to find expression through the central concept of Ubuntu and its focus upon social interdependence and community service. A strong sense of increased empathy towards others was expressed which was developed through group discussion into practical ideas for altruistic engagement. A number of young men became community activists, 2 volunteering in the local community development organisation and the Khanyisa group organising a men's march against gender violence through the community in April 2013, the first of its kind in the area.

Utilizing the natural environment to evoke meaningful transformational experiences within the group was considered important by all respondents:

'It has helped to work in nature. It's a quiet area and participation is good because nothing is disturbing us. Nature is friendly' (F).

It was observed that basing the workshops in nature, and the alternation of group work and physical activity/fun brought an energy to the process that allowed considerable ground to be covered. It also seemed to allow for prolonged focus upon the group exercises by participants. A growing number of methodologies taking a wilderness based approach are currently being developed and participants often report transcendent experiences as a result of spending time in nature. One wilderness facilitator writes: 'Suspending the normal reality for students by transporting them away from their daily comforts opens the doors for transformative learning to occur' (D'amato & Krasney, 2011:245).

It seems that basing this intensive work in a spacious, natural environment has offered an alternative field for investigation from that of the young men's usual communal field. This new environment seems to be able to suspend the usual influence of the field's social structures and allows them to analyse their situation in a less constricted manner, enabling the emergence of new, more personally congruent core beliefs and values. Further research into this area should prove highly valuable.

It was observed that there was a tangible field of trust and mutual respect built through engaging in this work as a small group over an extended period of time. Participants talked freely and openly within the group, noting the usual difficulty of doing so within their usual peer groups. An environment was created in which allowing a certain amount of personal vulnerability felt safe. A striking observation within this study was that the young men involved turned the common stereotype of men being difficult to engage in gender transformational programming upon its head. The young men were observed to experience a powerful sense of relief as they realised that every single member of the group found living up to the expected gender norms of their community impossible, each one describing how they thought they were 'the only one' who felt this way. The space and time given to the reflective sessions and subsequent trust formed within the group had created an environment in which one by one, participants were able to make their 'invisible' suppressed internal points of view 'visible' to the group. The experience of having such attitudes and beliefs reflected back through the group process worked to validate aspects of the young men's internal landscapes which had long been framed as fundamentally wrong and shame provoking. This newfound freedom to express previously hidden aspects of self allowed the group to rapidly reformulate their frames of reference regarding gender norms as the dominant narrative had been collapsed.

Peers seemed respectful, listened, and there was mutual support apparent:

'It has been good to have been part of the one group over a long period of time, and also to go back to the community and try out what we learned and then come back to the group and review what you have done, where you have failed. Most workshops, you come along and then that's it, there is no follow up, but coming back together like this as a group and having further discussions, I think it's helpful' (D).

This aspect of continuity was raised by all participants as central to the success of the programme. Critical reflection might not come naturally, for it to be well executed it may need to be learned and practiced repeatedly like any new skill (McAllister et al, 2013). Participants were able to bond as a group and establish the trust needed to enter into this depth of work. The process of intensive group reflection alternating with time back in their communities in order to model what had been learned, and time again as a group to reflect upon challenges they had faced in doing so, was essential in order for the new concepts and schemas to be internalised and stabilised.

The use of qualitative diaries within the study presented a useful way to track transformation in a linear way over the one year of the pilot programme. Through analysis of the diary entries it was clear that all participants had undergone a similar cycle of learning which had been understood through the lens of Ubuntu (See figure 3). Initially the young men became aware of Ubuntu in others, developing external awareness, sensitivity and empathy:

'I have seen Ubuntu in a teacher who goes out of his way to help his students' (G)/ 'My neighbours are like a family, they are kind to each other' (A)/ 'I have seen Ubuntu through the local community project' (F).

The next stage of the learning process involved them developing self-referential awareness and increased reflective abilities:

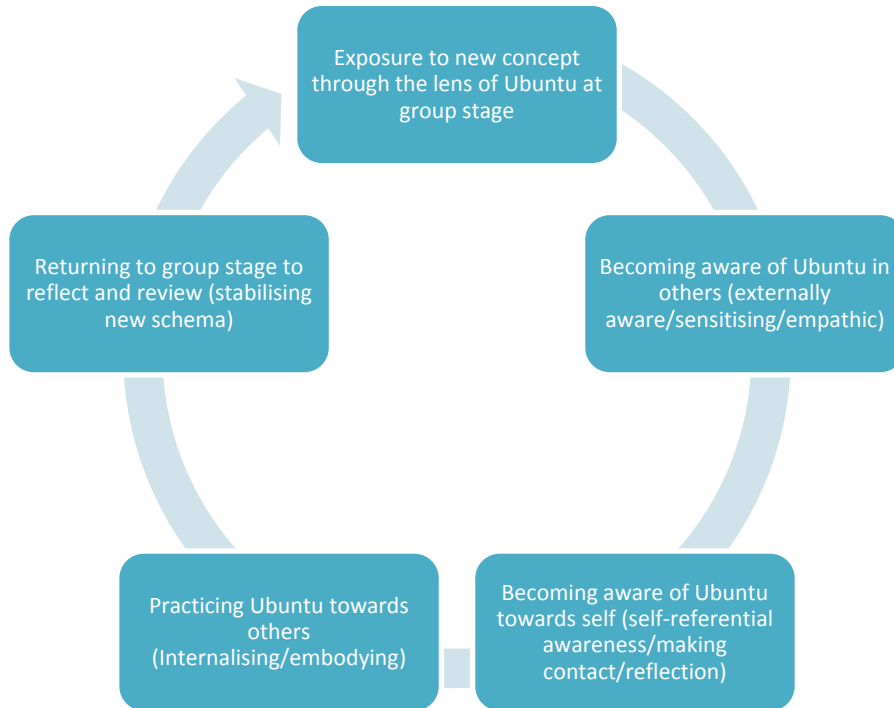
'I have noticed how kind my grandmother is towards me' (A)/ 'Most people don't have Ubuntu now; I am teased by my friends a lot' (C)/ 'Being cared for by others since I have been sick, this is Ubuntu' (F).

The diaries then showed the final stage of the process to involve practicing Ubuntu towards others, internalising, embodying and stabilising new schemas:

'Since Khanyisa, I don't beat my girlfriend anymore; I just sit down and talk things through' (B)/ 'I am practicing Ubuntu by helping my aunty to wash my younger brothers and sisters in the mornings and evenings' (E).

The participants had over time reformulated their structures for making meaning of experience through reflecting upon and familiarisation with the concept and application of Ubuntu, internalising newly formed habits of mind, and stabilising them through action.

Figure 3: The Khanyisa learning cycle



This study places this process of internalisation as central to the transformation of gender identity. This learning cycle mirrors the work of Jarvis (1995) who sees experience as a type of pivot between individuals and their environment, so that learning becomes a process of internalisation as they transform and make sense of this interaction. The culture and beliefs of the community these young men inhabit are socially constructed outcomes of a learning process which depends upon them internalising elements of their external world, and then externalising them through subsequent actions in and on that world, recreating similar conditions repeatedly. This also mirrors Bourdieu’s (2001b) concept of habitus and the manner in which societal norms are generated and regulated, perpetuating masculine domination as natural and self-evident. This study shows then that the very same processes which construct and maintain masculine domination can be utilised in the deconstruction of the same and reconstruction of schemas based upon fairness and equality. Thus, this reformulation and internalisation process was described by one respondent as:

‘My wish is to live Ubuntu and to practice Ubuntu without even thinking about it, I want it to be a part of me, a part of my blood, something that I do automatically without even thinking about it’ (C).

Ubuntu and Culturally Appropriate Pedagogies

'I have practiced Ubuntu today, I have taken my children to the clinic for the very first time, and usually my partner does that. My children were very happy and it improved my relationship with my partner' (F).

Using the concept of Ubuntu as a lens to engage in the work of transformation was shown to be highly effective:

'I think it is important to use Ubuntu because it's like a pillar. You can use Ubuntu to discuss gender based violence, you can use it to discuss HIV and AIDS, you can use Ubuntu to discuss a lot of different things' (B).

The cultural familiarity with the concept allowed for a rapid depth of analysis and reflection. Harris (2007:26) describes how colonial and post-colonial education systems are based on hegemonic pedagogical concepts which favour 'real knowledge' generated by scholars, often leading Southern hemispheric formal education systems to simply recycle such 'knowledge' rather than developing culturally appropriate interventions which adapts both the content of the programme and the manner of carrying out facilitation to the needs of the specific group.

With regards to reformulating structures of meaning, in this case concerning gender norms, Mezirow's use of a 'frame of reference' (2000:17-18) to describe the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions becomes highly relevant. Through analysis of the Khanyisa methodology it can be seen that through introducing the concept of Ubuntu as a habit of mind, at a level of functioning where moral consciousness, social norms and world view are produced, substantial changes in the resultant points of view of the Khanyisa participants arise naturally. Further, due to the emphasis upon equality, fairness and communal interdependence within the Ubuntu concept, these newly formed attitudes, beliefs and behaviours reflect these values, allowing culturally congruent transformation to occur which promotes gender equality.

As Desmond Tutu (1999:35) explains:

'A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.'

All respondents spoke of a shift from concern for only self/close family, to that of one towards others/the wider community due to the exploration of Ubuntu, for example:

'My understanding of Ubuntu has also grown. Ubuntu is something that you need to apply to everyone regardless of their gender, their age or their colour, whereas before I was only helping those who were closest to me' (B).

Community Expectations and Peer Pressure: Barriers to Reconstructing Masculinities

'We lead a false life so we will be recognised as good men within the community and society' (G).

A central insight arising from this study has been the significant challenges facing the young men when they do attempt to redefine their male identities and adapt a new behaviour. The respondents spoke of an almost overwhelming pressure from the community and peers (both male and female) to remain within the established gender norms, with examples of a lack of understanding and significant community backlash when attempting to model a deviation of these norms. One respondent explained:

'There is a problem for young men trying to do this in our society because sometimes you will try to clean or do the so called women's stuff and your parents will say don't worry, your sister will do that, so that's hard, and sometimes if you keep on trying to help some will think that it's a sign of being gay. This will hurt you and you will start wanting to do something which will prove that you are man enough, and you will stop doing so called women's stuff because you don't want to be labelled as gay' (B).

Therefore, such pressure to conform to gender norms enforced through the collusion of the communal field needs to be understood in order to find ways to tackle it.

The participants in this study developed their default ways of knowing and 'being' in response to the environment they inhabited, absorbing the objective social structures of their community and the wider society into a more subjective, and mental experience. As previously discussed, once this objective social structure had been fully internalised as the young men's personal core beliefs and values, a mutually contingent relationship led these core beliefs and values to reproduce the same objective structures. This 'cultural production' (Bourdieu, 2001b) also generated and regulated the norms of the community they found themselves within, and was therefore central to the perpetuation of masculine domination as a natural, self-evident universal.

And thus, the young men who engaged in the transformative education exercises, having gained some insight into problematic masculine beliefs and behaviours, and having adjusted their behaviour in light of this new knowledge had to some extent ‘woken up’ from the communal construction of perception, values and beliefs. And therefore, this deviation from the norm resulted in a community backlash experience.

One family member who had previously noted ways in which her grandson had changed for the positive through participation with Khanyisa also expressed confusion and frustration towards his changing behaviour, saying:

The other thing he has been doing is trying to cook.....sometimes he cooks OK, but most of the time he doesn't cook good food and I am always telling him that he must let the women or the girls do the cooking, but still every now and then he will want to try' (J).

The family member then refers to an incident which seems to describe the effect of her reaction to the young man:

'I think he is angry with me because after the [Khanyisa] camp I told him I wasn't happy about him cooking and he said sorry, but he did not eat that day, and went straight to bed' (J).

One participant spoke of the courage needed to model new strategies for being and acting within the community, hence:

The biggest challenge we are facing as we grow up is the expectations from other men. If you look at what we are learning [through Khanyisa] and these expectations you can say that they are opposites, so that's where you need to have courage, and I think that courage is the key, because if you don't have courage then even if you have all kinds of information and knowledge, without courage it is like nothing' (B).

A Holistic Community Development Approach to Gender Transformation

Although courage is needed in the process of transforming gender norms, simply focusing this work on one section of the community (in this case the young men) can be seen to be only a partial solution, and potentially damaging to those concerned if it causes alienation from the wider community. For the longer term, sustainable transformation in gender norms hoped for, the findings of this study indicate that programmes like Khanyisa should be delivered as an integral part of a more holistic community development approach which includes all sections of the community, in order to avoid new schemas of masculinity being undone and returned to the communal default:

'As our friends and neighbours have not been part of Khanyisa, what will happen is that what we have learned will slowly go away and in the long run we will totally forget about it' (F).

Harris (2007:30) argues that:

'It is vital for the success of a project aiming at producing social change to reach a critical mass of the population in each community where it works, in order to reduce social pressures to revert to the norms. Therefore it is important to incorporate people from all segments-men and women, boys and girls and if possible, temporal and spiritual leaders also-thus, enabling the entire community to work together'.

Welbourn (1999) also favours such an approach, pointing to the usefulness of engaging existing culturally defined groups within the community, generally divided along gender and age lines, allowing for each group to have safe private time and space to explore concerns particular to its members. These groups can then be brought together to present their hopes and fears to the other members of the community. This 'fission and fusion' approach then allows the separate groups to exchange and share these ideas and build on them to create new plans for the future, avoiding the community backlash experienced by the Khanyisa participants when they unilaterally challenged the communal gender norms. The use of approaches such as the Khanyisa programme for specific gender and age groups can then complement similar work within other sections of the community, leading to a whole community approach to the deconstruction of the local gender system to ensure that a more sustainable, long term transformation will occur:

'I think if more people are involved then soon this thing would spill out into the whole community, if more people are involved it will help the whole community and the whole country' (B).

Conclusion

In this study, it can be seen that the use of culturally appropriate transformative education approaches to masculinity can produce multiple beneficial results. The decreases in gender based violence and risk taking behaviour (including sexual risk taking) and the increased self-esteem, communication, community involvement and participation in household and parental responsibility indicate great potential for the use of similar approaches in work towards gender equality, tackling gender based violence and in HIV & AIDS programming.

The use of a culturally appropriate model for transformative education has been essential to the efficacy of this work and also, the use of the indigenous concept of Ubuntu as a lens through which to explore masculine identities in a South African context has allowed for a rapid immersion into the programme areas, with a deep reflective process and critical analysis occurring within the group's own cultural field.

Such cultural congruence has avoided a major potential pitfall of applying transformative education approaches in a Southern hemispheric context, namely placing often vulnerable, marginalised groups in a position where they are seen to be challenging the very culture they inhabit via a Northern/Western hemispheric bias (Bowers, 2005). Yet, exploring gender inequality through a culturally appropriate lens (in this case that of Ubuntu) allows for the deconstruction of existing gender systems and the development of new schemas constructed 'within' local culture and not 'in spite of it'.

It is also clear that in order to engage in the depth of work necessary to evoke meaningful transformation, longer term intensive interventions are required in order for trust to be built and the learning process to be entered into. The process of exposure to new concepts, building of awareness, reflection and critical analysis, and the internalisation and stabilisation of new schemas requires significant time and an environment where trust can be established. With the pressure to roll out country wide, policy led interventions to the largest possible population, requiring the minimum amount of resources, in order to produce evidence that large numbers have been reached, there is much to be learned from this study, because actual lasting internal shifts in the way humans perceive their world demands time and resources.

A key lesson to be learned through this study is that although such culturally appropriate transformative education approaches can result in welcome transformation in the gender identities of young male participants, to engage in such work in isolation, without complementary programmes being facilitated in other parts of the community can result in a significant lack of understanding and a negative backlash from the wider communal field. The internalisation of new schemas and the subsequent adaption of new behaviour will likely be seen as a deviation to the cultural gender norms and therefore a threat to the status quo, leading to further marginalisation of this group and communal pressure to revert to the default communal values and ideologies.

It is therefore essential that such efficacious approaches are integrated into a much broader whole community approach in order to achieve the critical mass required to produce lasting social change. In order for the sustainable and long term transformation required to create more equitable gender norms within society, changes in masculine identities are not in themselves enough. Nothing short of a communal deconstruction of the socio-cultural structures that lead to masculine domination at community and societal level will produce the conditions necessary for the emergence and stabilisation of new gender equitable social structures. Thus, the potential for positive social change as a result of such approaches is highly encouraging, and therefore, substantial further research in this important human development area is recommended.

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