

# **Masculinity: Key South African Issues & Debates**

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by  
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## Introduction

Until recently, South Africa was a 'man's country' (Morrell, 2001). Power was clearly held by men in public and political spheres. In families, the situation was no different. In both black and white families men earned the money, held the power and made the decisions. Men were often paid more than women for equivalent work done, and both custom and modern law discriminated against women. Masculinity and the advancement of women remain sensitive and contentious issues on the African landscape. Each culture has found different ways to express, protect and project male power. Each culture's men have often paid dearly for their membership of this oft privileged gender. Yet, as is shown below, beacons of hope are slowly emerging from the debates and struggles for gender change as men are included more and more directly in the change process.

## Multiple masculinities

Robert Morrell (Morrell 1998; Morrell 2001) argues that it is a mistake to regard men as a gender as having one fixed, monolithic or essential masculine identity. He quotes Andrea Cornwell when she argues against a stereotypical approach to men and gender "*old-style feminist theory dealt with men at one stroke: men were classed as the problem, those who stood in the way of positive change*". Morrell goes further to argue that multiple and changeable masculinities mean that positive change is possible:

*"Masculinities are constantly being protected and defended, are constantly breaking down and being re-created. For gender activists this conceptualisation provides space for optimism because it acknowledges the possibility of intervening in the politics of masculinity to promote masculinities that are more peaceful and harmonious."* Robert Morrell (2001)

Morrell takes this further by pointing out that it is an oft made mistake to forget that even though general images and styles of masculinity may be distilled from the social landscape, men experience their own masculinity on an intensely personal/individual and private level. Keeping this admonishment in mind, it may still be useful to list a few of the many examples of the 'masculinities' encountered in the South African milieu:

- *Men with guns* - Guns have been seen by a range of black and white men as integral to: struggles for liberation, robbery and assault, law enforcement, defending privilege and power, hunting and personal protection, sport and competition. (Cock 2001; Swart 2001; Xaba 2001; Wardorp 2001) Each of these uses brings with it its own contribution to a range of separate identities and ideas of masculinity, ranging from 'Freedom Fighter' to "Family Protector" (Another category of men related

- to this one could be seen to be those men who appose all forms of gun ownership)
- *Ukubekwezela: African Life Savers* - Blending strands of rural and urban masculinity, black lifesavers in Durban developed a utilitarian form of masculine identity that values qualities such as patience, dignity, pride and self respect, endurance and courage (Hemson, 2001).
  - *Hybrid men* - Men are forging hybrid identities through combining rural and urban African images with Western media and popular culture (GETNET 2001; Field 2001)
  - *Warriors in blue* - The Soweto Flying Squad has developed a utilitarian brand of masculinity that eschews boyish heroism and values maturity, self discipline, cool-headed courage, social awareness, restraint and decisiveness.(Wardorp, 2001)
  - *Gay men* - Sexual orientation has created a range of gay identities from 'quiet and private' to 'Flaming Drag Queens'. In addition to broad homophobia, these men have each had to face a range of taboos and judgements from their individual cultural and social groupings. (Reddy, 1998; van der Meide, 1998; Louw 2001)

### **Debating gender: Essentialists vs Social Constructionists**

Essentialists hold that gender characteristics are innate essences, and quote studies that find expression of these essences in chemical and biological differences, trace consistent gender characteristics across cultures and back across recorded history. Social constructionists on the other hand, reject notions of innate characteristics, arguing that gender constructions are purely the result of intersecting historical social and cultural factors at a particular moment in time (Sandra Swart, 1998). Put another way, one camp believes we are all born with inherent tendencies, while the others believe we are born as blank slates, shaped entirely by our environment. It would appear that orientations such as heterosexuality and male dominant behaviour are often defended on the basis of essentialism, and fiercely challenged on the basis of social constructionism.

In discussing issues of Manhood, it is clear to me that most men are essentialists, believing that many of their behaviours are innate and physiologically determined. Whether this is correct or not, it will be necessary to take this orientation into account as a current reality. This may begin to explain why social constructionists' arguments often have relatively little impact or effectiveness on changing the attitudes of men. In my experience, much greater success has been achieved by using an essentialists paradigm to challenge men to find a deeper, 'essential' goodness and fairness. This allows men to examine their own shadows and destructive potentials, but at least credits them with having the inherent potential to achieve democratic and peaceful manhood. This can be seen to underlie a perhaps unacknowledged essentialism among

committed constructionists when they use the following slogan to combat rape  
*"Real men don't rape! "*

### **Militarist South African masculinities**

In both black and white communities, masculinity was used to galvanise men in the protection of privilege on the one hand, and in the pursuit for freedom on the other. Both black and white men saw force as a legitimate means to forward the interests of their own social group.

In the struggle for liberation, being referred to as a young lion or a comrade was an intoxicating and proudly held status. For many young men coming from poor communities, where accolades of any kind were rare, this provided a powerful motivator or to get involved. Xaba (2001) argues that these accolades often produced disproportionate egos in young men, reinforced by the way in which these "Young Lions" were coveted by women (The question of how woman benefit from and have supported destructive forms of materialism and masculinity is yet to be addressed by the feminist movement). Sadly, liberation has not meant employment for many who contributed to it. Many young men who gave up their education to fight for freedom, now find themselves under-qualified and unemployed. These comrades have no legitimate means to attain the "good things" in life, and have turned to their guns once again to get what they feel they deserve. In a short space of time their aggressive potential has stopped being applauded, and they have changed social status from the liberators to criminals.

Themes of being brave defenders of all that is good and holy were used to motivate and galvanize young white men in the struggle to maintain white domination (Morrell 1998; Epstein 1998). Radio programmes and support programmes applauded the "brave young men on the border". Black men with opposing political ideals were cast as enemies, and white men were morally sanctioned (by men and women) to use lethal force against the "swart-gevaar" (Swart 2001). As political consciousness has grown, many white men now sit with guilt and shame about their readiness to serve "their country". Once trained to rely on firearms, both black and white men are now exhorted to give them up (Cock 2001), and white men are called to apologise for their 'struggle'.

*"The history of masculinity is not made exclusively by men. Women opposed certain aspects of masculinity and supported others. They did so in ways that reflected the class and race forces... the history of South African femininity has not yet been written, although there are large number of works on women. For our purposes we need to note that while women operated in oppressive gender contexts, many supported "their" men. This support ranged from white woman sending food parcels to their "Boys on the border" in the*

*1970s and Eighties, to black women like Winnie Mandela advocating the killing of spies and collaborators in the turbulent 1980s." (Morrell 2001)*

### **Woman's rights as workers**

Despite passing a range of resolutions and policies over the years, Patricia Appolis (1999) argues that Cosatu has been slow in implementing woman's rights. Cosatu leadership is still dominated by men, and women are not represented proportionately in leadership structures. Furthermore, she argues that few unions have included equal pay for equal work in collective bargaining agendas with companies. While these are issues relating more specifically to women, they cannot be divorced from men's issues, as men are the individuals who are holding on to power and privilege (or failing to see or appreciate the urgency of women's plight).

### **Sexual harassment**

Around 76 per cent of women have been subjected to some form of sexual harassment during their working lives (SHEP - Sexual Harassment Education Project 1999). Supervisors often abuse their power to demand sex from female employees, promising them job security in return. When such demands are refused and reported, men are inclined to retreat by saying "We were only playing". In circumstances such as this, it is difficult to determine the line between humour and a real threat. Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. Examples of physical sexual harassment are touching, patting, pinching or fondling. Examples of verbal sexual harassment are sexual advances, telephone calls with sexual overtones, comments about a person's body. Examples of non verbal sexual harassment are leering, and winking. While some of these behaviours are clearly identifiable as harassment, the difference between leering, staring, and looking are not as clear.

In raising consciousness about sexual harassment, the University of the Western Cape has used the strategy of equating sexism with white supremacy and racism. This strategy has been effective in countering male student arguments are that there is no such thing as sexual harassment in African culture. This project has taken care to attempt to avoid demonising men, attempting rather to emphasise the importance of safety and security for female students. Indeed, casting men as an evil enemy does very little to endear men to transformation and change.

## The New Man

Situated squarely within and the social constructionists camp, masculinity studies have taken as a starting point that men do indeed dominate and oppress women. These dominant forms of masculinity are seen as social constructions, open to change. From these and other sources a picture of "The new man" has emerged.

*"Although a caricature, it is helpful to identify some of his features: introspective, caring, anxious, outspoken on woman's rights, domestically responsible. The new man also turned his back on competitive sport, sexist jokes, violent outdoor pursuits." (Morrell, 1998)*

Writers from this social construction perspective clearly see those from the more essentialist mythopoetic men's movement as a threat to this "new man". Morrell interprets the writing of Bly and Keen as an attack on the new man. He believes that their essential message is that *"men must assert themselves, be decisive, take charge"*. Having studied his work, attended his workshop and engaged with him personally, my understanding and experience of Bly was that he is extremely respectful of women's rights, believes in democratic and equal gender relations. He has in fact been accused by some men as "selling out" to women. What he has emphasised is that weak, indecisive and confused men do not serve themselves, women, or the planet in general. I have a suspicion that Morrell and Bly share much more in terms of concern for society than what can be deduced from the war of words. Furthermore, I am disappointed that Morrell casts Keen in the light he does, given Keen's own vision of the 'new man'. Keen (1992) contrasts old masculinity ('Homesteaders') with emerging masculinity ('Pilgrims') :

*" In the next decades we will see a widening division between two types of men and two visions of Manhood as the conflict grows more intense between the traditional Western patriarchal, technological, militaristic world-view and the new Quantum, ecological, cooperative world-view. For a moment I would designate them as follows:*

<b><i>Homesteaders.</i></b>	<b><i>Pilgrims</i></b>
<i>Citizens.</i>	<i>Questors.</i>
<i>Believers.</i>	<i>Questioners</i>
<i>Culture bound.</i>	<i>Transcend their time and tribe</i>
<i>Once born</i>	<i>Twice born</i>
<i>Frequently unconscious</i>	<i>Frequently painfully conscious</i>
<i>Initiated into and remain within the mythic horizon of their society.</i>	<i>Undertake a heroic journey into unknown, tabooed, uncharted territory</i>
<i>May be powerful or weak.</i>	<i>Are usually vulnerable and strong.</i>
<i>The good they do springs from their practice of our civic virtues, adherence to duty, a law and order, conserving tradition.</i>	<i>The good they do springs from their invention of innovative virtues, prophetic visions, a sensitivity to new vocations, creating novelty.</i>
<i>The evil they do springs from obedience and banality.</i>	<i>The evil they do springs from overreaching ambition, or hubris</i>
<i>May be candidates for the wall of fame as archetypes of excepted heroic types.</i>	<i>May be candidates for the hall of exemplars for incarnating new ideals and philosophies of life.</i>

Other than writing from a religious fundamentalist perspective, I have yet to come across misogynism or power-mongering in the writings of men like Bly and Keen.

Joining the sentiments (in my view) of Bly and Keen, Morrell calls men to challenge destructive masculinities, and gives the following suggestions for areas of focus:

Militarization and ownership of guns should be opposed in government and on the street

Laws which discourage violence should be supported

Men should examine their contribution to loss of life, such as aggressive driving habits

School curricula should be diversified to enable boys to choose from a wider range of masculinities and opportunities

Fathers should encourage their sons to play non-aggressive sports, or involve themselves in recreational extra-curricular activities. They should also be encouraged to assist in household tasks along with their sisters and mothers.

Men should participate in decision-making as equals with their spouses, not making decisions alone or unilaterally.

Challenge all forms of masculinity which result in violence and conflict

GETNET (Daphne 1999) has run a series of workshops for men around gender equality and new masculinity. Initial results have been encouraging. Men in these workshops have begun to acknowledge some of the detrimental aspects of popular masculinity. Some of the acknowledgments are listed below:

Gender relations are often stereotypical and oppressive in nature

Men have also had negative consequences, such as having to suppress emotions and put on a brave exterior

Traditional gender conditioning on men has had a dehumanising effect

The perceived benefits of being a stereotypical man are closely connected to male privilege arising out of oppressive gender relations

The harmful effect of competition

Men maintain oppressive gender roles because of social expectations and pressure

There are considerable gains for men who do not conform, such as improved family relationships

There are great gains for women when men change, such as being holistically loved

The obstacles to change are many, but should not deter men from working towards meeting equity challenges

The following quote from one of the male participants points to hopeful progress for the future:

*"I never expected to learn so much in such a short period of time. I have changed my attitude, and believe it is important to hold this workshop for other men. Yesterday I saw problems. Today I began seeing solutions. The workshop has shown me a lot. What we have been teaching each other are things I knew but did not realise. I now feel like I can be a new man. I now believe both sides need to come together to solve problems. (Daphne 1999).*

Participants in the workshop were encouraged to flesh out a vision of what a "New man" may look like. Many participants struggled to come to terms with what this may mean in specific terms, but the following impressive list of qualities was

produced:

#### A new man

- Shares domestic work and childcare in all environments;
- Helps children grow up differently;
- Acknowledges his so-called 'feminine' side by showing emotions, that is, by being totally human;
- Acts in a non violent manner;
- Works for gender equality openly and publicly at all levels of society;
- Less competitive, more co-operative and more selfless;
- Acknowledges his limitations, defeats and weaknesses;
- Learns more about gender oppression and is sensitive to woman's dilemmas and needs;
- Understands men's dilemmas, supports and assists their change.

### **Unemployment**

Popular conceptualisations of masculinity in both black and white cultures emphasize being employed and earning lots of money. High levels of unemployment among black men, (and increasingly among white men) present a grave threat to men's self esteem and manhood. The inability to support a family financially frequently equals failure. As reported in the interview with Ebizweni (Elliott 2003), women are known to shame or taunt men who are unemployed, emphasising that they are sexually only available to the employed. Men have little conceptualisation or support for the idea of being homemakers, and thus find little self-esteem in domestic chores. New conceptualisations of masculinity will have to address this difficult perception among men as fewer and fewer men find gainful employment.

### **Workers as fathers**

Following on the heels of successful negotiations for maternity leave, the spotlight has recently fallen on the rights of workers as fathers in this regard (Appolis, 1998). More and more companies are now recognising the right, and the need, for fathers to assist and be present during the early stages of their children's lives. Expecting women to be sole caretakers of children as well as joint breadwinners perpetuates gender bias and exploitation of female domestic labour.

In a much more contentious arena, men have begun questioning female domination in custody battles, as well as certain laws prohibiting men access to their children while forcing them to pay maintenance at same time. Until

overturned in the recent Fraser case, women were allowed to give children born out of wedlock up for adoption without consulting the biological father (de Villiers, 1998) Gains made by men in restoring a more just and equitable power balance in parental laws have not been met with great enthusiasm by feminist activists.

### **Sexism hurts men as well**

Ira Horowitz (1997) contends that men have much to gain by unlearning the conditioning that turns them into oppressors. In a gender awareness workshop run by GETNET that included men from five provinces and some trade union movements, the following rigidly enforced social conditioning or "gendering" of men was uncovered:

*"Men are supposed to be:*

*Strong and tough and hide pain; a fighter/defend self, sister and property; compete/be better than girls and other boys; do the physical work, heavy duties; be in control, be in authority positions; do well academically and pursue "manly" careers/occupations; drink alcohol and smoke; and have sex with lots of females.*

*Boys are not supposed to:*

*Be friends with girls; cry/show our emotions; cook/do household duties; or wear woman's clothing.*

*Failure to follow these prescriptions results in boys being:*

*Isolated (outcast/no friends); labeled as weak, moffie, sissy, etc; beaten by fathers, grandparents, other boys or teachers; laughed at by girls; and told they are a failure and feeling like one."(Horowitz 1997)*

Men reported that they were constantly under pressure to perform and "act like a man". This pressure included achieving, being a provider and assuming responsibility, suppressing their feelings, concealing their failures and facing death as a soldier. While the content varied from time to time, the constant theme was: *Pressure*. The consequences of this pressure and stereotypical male behaviour were regarded to be the following:

*"Stress and other health problems which shorten our lives; depression; frustration; substance abuse; hurting ourselves or others; isolation from family, friends etc; loss of self-esteem (if you are not a success); suppression of emotions such as compassion, co-operation, nurturance; and living beyond our means." (Horowitz 1997)*

Men also reported a very limited range of coping behaviours. Men either dropped out (withdrawal, commit suicide), numbed out (alcohol and drug addiction) or punched out (violence and domination). After having considered the costs of stereotypical male roles, workshop participants listed the following gains men could achieve by not conforming:

*Peace of mind (enjoy a better life); ease the pressure; good example for your children; be less inclined to commit crime and violence; collective decision-making; more productive at work; less tension (improved health); emotional satisfaction; possibility of having close non-sexual relationships with women, men and children; accessing different kinds of experience, e.g. child care and cooking; value things other than material objects; being able to accept help from others; better sense of identity; and tap into all human resources including woman's skills." (Horowitz 1997)*

### **Violence without a subject**

In a compassionate and incisive article, Jorgen Lorentzen (1998) how therapy illuminates the psychological mechanisms violent men use to escape personal reflection and responsibility. The first mechanism is that of reversed feelings. Here men blame women for making them "so angry" that they hit them. Whether or not the woman did indeed make a mistake, all too often both women and men will collude with the understanding that the woman 'caused' the abuse. Men do not describe themselves as the subjects of their own (violent) actions. They regard women as the problem, who act in such a way that men simply 'have' to react. The following quote illuminates some of the strategy and the hidden fears underlying this behaviour:

*"I feel small and master this feeling by making her even smaller. I am afraid and overcome this by making her even more afraid. I am hurt and overcome this by hurting her... I feel powerless and master the feeling by assuming power and control over my immediate surroundings. I do not think of myself as afraid, I think of her as dangerous. I do not consider myself insecure, I consider her untrustworthy..." (Lorentzen 1998)*

The second mechanism operating inside men is their inability to share their own pain. The majority of perpetrators have been victims in their own childhoods. When a man's wife does not come home on time (continuing the previous example), but arrives late, the following description exposes what may really be going on inside the man who batters:

*"He is afraid. Has something happened? He is insecure. Doesn't she love me any more? Doesn't she care about me, who is left alone at home, waiting? Slowly, he begins telling us about violence in his own home when he was a child: his father, who was like a ticking bomb. His mother, sitting in the bedroom crying, with bruises all over her body. Himself as a boy - the heavy pain in his body with no language to express it, a pain he has never shared with anyone. A new picture of this man is starting to take shape. A new story is slowly emerging. He is telling us about his own vulnerability and powerlessness; about emotions that have no language and which cannot be communicated. He is describing events in his own life for which there is no place in a man's world. In a man's world, you are supposed to be tough and bear the hardships you are subjected to. The man in the therapy room is telling us about a sense of insecurity in his own emotional life, which, were it known to others, would reveal that he's not actually a "Real man".(Lorentzen 1998)*

Here it becomes clear why men often insist that it is women who are to blame for their acts of violence. This feels far safer than admitting their own feelings of insecurity, as that would threaten to break the idea of real masculinity. To be vulnerable would be unmanly.

The third dynamic operating in abusive scenarios is socially sanctioned or ignored abuse of power. These men feel in some way that they have the right of ownership over a woman, that she should exist primarily for him. If she arrives home late she is breaking a 'law', and has to be 'punished'. He feels a righteous anger towards her, and uses violence to assert his rights or his own version of "justice".

A combination of these three dynamics produce a man who is out of touch with his emotions, without a sense of subjective responsibility and who thinks the use of his force is justified and legitimate. Lorentzen maintains that these men will seldom take responsibility for their own actions merely through processes of empathy and self reflection, and need to be challenged directly in the context of gender awareness as well. He goes further to acknowledge that often the work done on domestic violence is concentrated appropriately on helping women, but that it is important to work with the men themselves if we want the violence to end. He quotes a Norwegian study which found that the majority of violent men experienced or witnessed a violent father themselves. These men did not have to be subjected to violence themselves, but merely to observe unchecked violence by their own fathers against their mothers for this pattern to repeat itself in their own lives. This socialisation towards violence can be reinforced and externalised by popular film and media images glorifying force and violence, as well as modern capitalist trends to squeeze maximum performance out of employees without regard for their emotional health.

## **Putting masculinity back into gender studies and initiatives**

Men have all too often only been represented as "opposite" in the conflictual power relations within patriarchy (Hansen, 1998). Many men do wish to be supportive, but feel somewhat alienated by feminism in general:

*"Our wives have become feminists. We want to support them, but we feel like the bad guys."( quoted in Morrell 1998)*

Very few men have become involved in feminist gender struggles, although involvement by such gender sensitive men are welcomed by women. Some women wish to encourage the actions of gender sensitive men, but many female activists fear that the "cause" for women will be diluted if men are included.

*"Announcing a new aspect of minority politics, Staples calls for special attention be to be given to black American men. The success of feminism in focusing attention on the disadvantaged lot of woman has had the unintended consequence of making the problems of black men invisible and depriving them of a voice to state their case" Morrell (2001)*

*"Masculinity studies are considered a field by some, by others a fad or even a fraud. This is for a number of reasons: it has been seen by some feminist scholars as encroaching on the province of women's studies. This has been seen by some as an act of infiltration, so as to numb the polemical thrust... Many social scientists assume that the bulk of the work has already been on men, and so the gender conscious should concentrate on women. The error here is twofold: the first, the assumption that accurate work is possible without a gender consciousness, and second, the idea that the work about the actions of men took cognisance of their feelings about being men and how being men impacted on their lives and the lives of others, or how ideas about what being a man meant changed over time." (Sandra Swart, 1998).*

Julie Oyegun (1998) warns that one of the dangers of excluding men from analysis and intervention is that women end up isolated and retained in victim/problem mode. Flowing from this kind of awareness, the gender equity unit at the University of the Western Cape has decided to actively include men and masculinity in the gender programme.

*"We shall learn to strike a balance so that we can address the needs and priorities of both genders without detracting from our commitment to gender equality and enhancing the status of and*

*opportunities for women at this university." (GEU official quoted in Oyegun 1998).*

*"We, as feminist change agents must interrogate the manner in which we may be working ourselves into a political cul-de-sac in conceptualising gender (and consequently addressing gender issues) to exclude the gender of men, it is suggested, in a sexist and truncated fashion." (Oyegun, 1998)*

There is clearly a large part of feminism that is not so much about gender justice per say, but about advancing the interests of women as an interest group. In most instances where the words "gender issues" are used, what is actually meant is "women's issue".

*"The term 'Gender' has become a politically correct term, and thus tends to be over-used and used loosely, often conveying the right political message at the expense of accurate meaning. Most notably in this context, "gender" is now often used when "women" is what is really meant, which means that a project which really targets only women can be disguised as a more politically acceptable project aiming to redress gender-based imbalances and hierarchies of power." (Oyegun, 1998)*

I am unaware of any "gender justice" marches by the feminist movement to demand that more men are given jobs in female dominated sectors such as in the clothing industry, nor have there been to my knowledge any marches demanding that more women be given jobs in the male-dominated but dangerous jobs like those in the underground mining sector. I fear that many legitimate and necessary challenges to male domination are jeopardised or resisted when men can instinctively or analytically detect bias in the starting premise.

One of the advantages of including masculinity in gender studies and initiatives, is that it opens the possibility for direct intervention with men themselves. There are many historical reasons why women distrust gatherings of men that exclude women. Yet, single sex gatherings have proven important vehicles for change for women in the past, and there is a growing acceptance that all-male interventions may create an entry point for men to address a range of gender issues. Speaking of the Million Man March in the USA, Bell (in Oyegun 1998) notes that many female activists were suspicious of this initiative:

*"In its concept, it appeared that a gathering that excluded women would serve all the sexist and patriarchal notions decried here... indeed, many of them opposed the march. In actuality, however, the largest gathering of black males in the nation's history served to advance the goal of black male responsibility, dignity, and gender*

*equality." (Morrell, 1998)*

It is argued that alliances with men can increase the rate of change. Not only must men be challenged, but they clearly need alternatives to dominant and exploitative masculinities as well.

*"Whether they are complementary or in contradiction, woman's gender interests clearly exist fundamentally in relation to men's. Expanding the cultural room for manoeuvre for women must be complemented by expanding the scope of possibilities for men. This is so whether men are seen as the problem, obstructing woman's development, or also as "having problems" in the current gender culture. In a strategic perspective for structural transformation, men, at least as much as women, must become the subjects of change." (Oyegun, 1998)*

More and more projects traditionally focused exclusively on female gender rights are now developing and including programmes for men. One such project in Alexandra called ADAPT (Agisangang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training) has developed such a programme based on the belief that men need to be part of a solution to violence against women. Men need to be liberated as well, and not only be confronted with sexism, domestic violence, addiction, and under-parenting. They acknowledge that men need to undergo a healing process, to break free from the impossible burdens society places on them as well. These include having always to be *"strong, providers, leaders and winners at any cost, as well as having to hide their emotions"* (Nkosi 1998).

### **Direct partnerships between activists**

In an attempt to involve both men and women in examining and confronting gender oppression and abuse on farms, two specialist gender organisations decided to approach the problem in a joint venture. One project was exclusively staffed by females (WFP - Woman on Farms Project ) and the other exclusively by males (5 in 6 Project). This proved to be a great challenge to both projects, as each one was subtly entrenched in their own gender-biased perspectives. In an encouraging show of real honesty, each project realised they had to face a number of issues as activists themselves. Below is a listing of some courageous and searching questions each project asked themselves (Parenzee 1998):

#### *Questions facing WFP*

*To what extent has WFP assumed the emotional characteristics of the women with whom they work and as a result respond to situations in a similar way? Woman farm workers are trapped within the patriarchal society in which they live and experience frustration and helplessness - to*

*what extent have we assumed those feelings, and taken on the role of "Victim"?*

*Have the difficulties and anger of women that exist because of being in a male-dominated world in which women are seen as second-class citizens been translated and carried over to the work with men? Has WFP, as a woman's organisation working with women farm workers in the area of violence against women, transferred its frustrations to interactions with men?*

*How does not having men in the organisation impact on woman's working relationship with men, specifically around the issue of violence against women, especially when the perception is that all women suffer as a result of this violence and all men benefit largely because of this violence? To what extent has the attitude being or perceived to have been one of "All men are bad" and "all women are victims"?*

*How has WFP dealt with issues of power and powerlessness when interacting with men from the 5 in 6 Project? Have we played the role of "Victim", "manipulator" or "tyrant"?*

#### *Questions facing 5 in 6 Project*

*How does one address sensitive issues of violence against women with a group of men, challenge unacceptable behaviour and ensure they recognise that they have a responsibility to rid society of violence against women?*

*Men working with men on violence against women is new. How has fear of men's reaction in having their power challenged influenced the approach of 5 in 6 Project in dealing with violence against women?*

*A mission of the 5 in 6 Project is to prove to a society, wrought by wrongs of men, that there are good men. Yet, how does one create a distinction between perpetrators and activists? Are all men to some degree perpetrators because they benefit from violence against women? Is 5 in 6 Project sitting with an enormous amount of "male - guilt" and if so, how are they dealing with it?*

*To what extent has 5 in 6 Project shied away from addressing violence against women directly because it makes them feel uncomfortable? And to what extent has the 5 in 6 Project adopted what can be considered the defensive male approach - "We are not all bad" - when addressing the violence against women?*

*How does the project deal with its power when working with WFP? Does it become the "tyrant", "victim" or "manipulator"?*

## Conclusion

While there appears to be much cause for hope for gender change, it remains clear that no group (male or female) easily gives up advantage and privilege voluntarily. The issues and debates are still taking and changing shape. Women can find partners among in their quest for equality. This quest will be all the more successful if, together with challenge, men are approached in an inclusive, compassionate manner with understanding for their often painful individual experience and legitimate personal needs. Activists will do well to avoid alienating men by paying head to the parallels for masculinity identity evident in struggles to maintain cultural identity:

*“Why do some people feel so strongly about being overtaken by western values? What many Africans find unacceptable about the human rights movement, says Nhlapo, is the notion that theirs is a delinquent culture which requires to be “sorted out” by a more advanced and superior one. This is the very kind of thinking that characterised the earlier colonial period.” (GETNET 2001)*

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