Working through resistance in engaging boys and men towards gender equality and progressive masculinities

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Over the last two decades, a focus on challenging and transforming dominant forms of masculinity and engaging boys and men towards gender equality and healthy masculinities has permeated South African social and health sciences and the humanities. This focus on men and boys has also been evident in intervention and activist work. However, the turn to boys, men and masculinities has not gone without resistance, contestation and contradictions. A range of localised and global realities has frustrated much of the enthusiasm for rapid, sweeping and concrete changes regarding gender justice and the making of progressive masculinities. Among the discursive and material forces that oppose work that engages boys and men are those to do with income-related issues, race and racism, cultural traditions and gender itself. Because of this, it is contended that engagement with boys and men needs to consider not only gender but also economic inequality, poverty and unemployment, divisions created by race, and struggles around tradition. This paper discusses these forces that undermine and counteract work with boys and men and how we might work through resistance in engaging with men and boys.

Keywords: gender equality; working with men; money; tradition; race; South Africa

Introduction

This paper focuses on what might be understood as social and psychological resistance to changing gender relations and transforming masculinities. Concerned primarily with work on or with Black masculinities in South Africa, the argument offered here is, however, informed by the international and national research literature and activism that has focused on challenging, deconstructing and transforming dominant forms of masculinity by engaging boys and men towards progressive masculinities and gender justice (e.g., Connell 1995; Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell 2005; Morrell 2001; Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger 2012; Segal 1993; Shefer, Stevens, and Clowes 2010).

Over the last two decades, concern for masculinities has permeated South African social and health sciences as well as the humanities (e.g., Clowes, Ratele, and Shefer 2013; Morrell 1998; Reid and Walker 2005; Shefer et al. 2007; Vetten and Ratele 2013). This focus on men and boys has been evident in programmatic interventions as well as activist work, just as it has been globally (e.g., Greig and Edström 2012; Minerson et al. 2011; Peacock 2012; Stern, Peacock, and Alexander 2009; World Health Organization 2007). The turn to men and boys has not gone without resistance, contestation and contradictions, however.

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Reports have shown that working with men and boys can be effective (e.g., Dworkin et al. 2013; Ringheim and Feldman-Jacobs 2009; World Health Organization 2007). Barker and colleagues (World Health Organization 2007, 16) have reported that:

... men and boys apparently can and do change attitudes and behaviour related to sexual and reproductive behaviour, maternal, newborn and child health, their interaction with their children, their use of violence against women, questioning violence with other men and their health-seeking behaviour as a result of relatively short-term programmes.

The World Health Organization (2010) has concluded that ‘men and boys are able and often willing to change their attitudes and practices and, sometimes, to take a stand for gender equality’ (12). Hearn and associates (2012) suggested that one approach to the notion of hegemonic masculinity in Sweden ‘highlights how gender equality discourses and changes in gender relations have influenced and changed men’s practices’ (18). Peacock (2013) has argued that the non-governmental organisation Sonke Gender Justice’s work ‘is bringing about gradual but inexorable shifts in public perceptions related to the roles and responsibilities of men in society, especially as they relate to gender roles and relations’ (136). The International Men and Gender Equality Survey found that ‘men are generally positive about gender equality’ (Levtov et al. 2014, 491).

That said, challenges remain in trying to effect fundamental and large-scale changes in gender relations and patriarchal, violent masculinities. While some men and boys embrace efforts towards gender transformation, others, from different walks of life, across many countries, oppose policies, politics and programmes seeking to change gender relations and masculinities. Research on the One Man Can campaign in South Africa indicates that some young men may resist change because their identities as men are ‘an important resource through which to contest marginalisation and disempowerment’ (van den Berg et al. 2013, 122). Men’s support for gender equality often remains abstract and does not necessarily translate into gender equality in practice, evidenced by ‘low levels of men’s participation in household and caregiving tasks, and in high levels of violence’ (Levtov et al. 2014, 491).

A range of localised and global dynamic realities, both material and discursive, tempts any enthusiasm for rapid, sweeping and practical changes on gender justice and healthy, caring, progressive masculinities. Realities that shape and influence work with men and boys differ from context to context. In South Africa, issues that appear to frustrate the prospects of concrete, swift and widespread changes in gender relations include income-related issues (including poverty, [un]employment and income inequality), race-related issues (including racism and the hegemony of Whiteness), cultural tradition and gender itself. This is by no means a complete list of possible countervailing forces. However, these particular issues in South Africa, given the attention they receive from government and media (e.g., Malan 2013; National Development Commission 2011; South African Press Association 2015; Weavind 2014), may be in need of closer consideration if the work of engaging boys and men is to be more effective and move more rapidly. These dynamic and often contradictory issues tend to be relatively neglected within gender-critical work with men and boys, an indication that perhaps they could be viewed as not central in (pro)feminist masculinities work. Vigorous and sophisticated attention may need to be given to them as they jostle and interact with gender, possibly influencing men and boys from supporting gender change. ‘This does not mean’, as Segal (1993) has argued, ‘ignoring the prevalence and variety of exploitative, abusive, and coercive actions from men, quite the contrary, but rather attempting to situate them within the social and discursive conditions and frameworks that either foster or discourage such behaviour’ (638).
Why resistance?

The term resistance is used in various ways in the health and social sciences, and the range of practices described by the term is broad. Resistance can be against oppressive structures (such as hegemonic hetero-sexist masculinity), but it can also be against practices that subvert oppression (for instance, against alternative, non-heteronormative practices) (see Govender 2011). In addition, resistance can be collective or individual in character.

Drawing upon insights from psychoanalytic theory, resistance here denotes that which opposes what we seek to overcome (Rycroft 1968/1972). In psychoanalysis, resistance refers to that which we have to work through – or it repeats itself in various guises (Freud 2001/1958). The intriguing aspect of resistance thus conceived is that it highlights the fact that even if structures and practices of masculinities may lead to physical, social and psychological injury to complicit men themselves (besides the violence against women and children), men and boys might still cling to violent or hetero-patriarchal masculinities – just as some people hold on to their illness (Freud 2001/1958). Even though the psychoanalytic notion of working through resistance (rather than dismissing it) looks potentially like a device for engaging men and boys towards gender equality, in this case, resistance is still apprehended in social terms (without neglecting the psychological). Hence, instead of defining ‘resistance as the process and act of challenging one’s subordinated position in a given social system’, as Haslam and Reicher (2012, 155) have done, resistance here is taken as a reactionary social and psychological opposition to challenges to existing gender relations and hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Resistance is worth examining because it is, as Foucault (1990) observed, beckoned by power. In working with boys and men against the subordination of girls and women, gender and sexual violence, and towards healthier forms of masculinities, we are likely to encounter resistance. Yet, whilst the effects of resistance are commonly observable in work with men and boys, the phenomenon has not attracted enough gender-critical attention. And so it is proposed that we ought to learn to anticipate that our engagements with boys and men will be characterised by dynamism, contradictions and contestations whose final goal is to resist transformation, frustrate change and conserve existing relations of gender power. Above all, and at different points, we should expect and plan to work through resistance in engaging men and boys toward gender justice and progressive, pro-feminist masculinities.

Reactionary resistance at different points

Resistance is evident at different points in work to transform masculinities. The obvious case of resistance is that ‘from men still committed to gender privilege, or from men who accept gender equality in principle but do little about it in practice’ (Connell 2003, 9). Others have remarked on the ‘conflicts, contradictions and resistance’ to change with respect to government policy and practice (Shefer et al. 2008, 160). Resistance to gender equality policies and programmes may also result from material benefits men accrue from gender inequality and ideological justification of male supremacy (Connell 2003).

An interesting case is that of:

... resistance on the part of some women to involving men in gender and development work – driven by fear about the dilution of the feminist agenda, and by anxieties over the diversion of limited resources away from women’s empowerment initiatives and back into the hands of men. (Esplen 2006, 1)

Jewkes, Flood and Lang (2014) have observed that some female gender activists have resisted the ‘prioritisation of, and resource allocation for, work with men on violence
prevention’ (1). Such resistance could emanate from the fact that ‘gender analysis is often confined to women and girls’ (Dover 2014, 92).

In relation to South Africa, a close reading of policy documents and discussion papers reveals that although the ruling party has produced progressive, well-intentioned documents on gender, there is a clear conflation of gender with women and girls. For example, even though the 2012 African National Congress gender policy discussion document starts off by observing that ‘gender is a socially constructed understanding of what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman’ (2), and there is reference to men and relatively more mention of boys in the document, what the document is basically aimed at is women’s and girls’ empowerment. Women’s and girls’ empowerment is significant in working toward gender justice. However, the empowerment of women and girls is not exhaustive of gender relations and practices. Boys and men are gendered too. Contestations and hierarchies within masculinities matter. Violence against men and boys should be of concern in interventions, policy discussions and policymaking on health, gender and sexuality. Broadly speaking, then, there appears to be a lack of conviction about men, and to a lesser extent about boys, as gendered subjects – a disinclination that possibly contributes to the neglect of men as vulnerable to physical and sexual violence and health problems arising from gender regimes (Clowes 2013).

Resistance is also evident at the point of the individual men’s behaviour, for example regarding anxiety-associated identity problems about gender change and emotional antipathy against gender-based programmes (Connell 2003). Resistance at the level of individual men and boys is often encountered in face-to-face interactions, when working in small groups with boys and men or in an interview with a research participant. We should therefore not neglect psychological resistance, just as we should not neglect forms of resistance characterising institutions, cultures and structures. And while much of our attention may need to be dedicated to resistance within structures like the state, the wider culture and intermediate institutions like families, we must be provoked to imagine what makes a boy desire gender equality or not; by what prompts a school-boy in a recent focus group discussion to say:

Roughly translated: ‘Men are heads of households. Women must respect them [men]. If a woman wants to be a man, it shows disrespect for her husband’

The above expression of reactionary resistance by a boy emerged in a study of 14–16-year-old school-going boys from seven schools in the Western Cape (Ratele et al. 2007). What is interesting in the boy’s account is the way it conveys how cultural traditions are a fundamental yet neglected issue in working with boys and men toward gender justice and progressive masculinities. Nowhere in that exchange was culture or tradition explicitly mentioned, although they would become more evident in the focus-group discussion. Also, nowhere are gender or sexuality mentioned. But accounts of tradition and gender intersect to produce the resistance conveyed in the extract. Of particular importance is that the effect of the boy’s account is ultimately to resist efforts for gender and sexuality change and transforming masculinities. In engaging boys and men, we ought to be aware that we are engaging the cultural traditions in which their practices are embedded. At the same time, in working through the resistance that we are likely to encounter in trying to change gendered traditions, we have to be critical of our own biases too. Uncovering how a teenager acquires such a ‘language of tradition’ is perhaps the first step in overcoming some of the difficulties of getting boys and men to change and support gender justice.
Three possible consequences follow from underscoring the reactionary resistance encountered in working with boys and men. First, we observe that there could be an association between resistance to change and the fact that despite increasing work on gender and sexual violence, levels of violence remain high in South Africa (Jewkes et al. 2012; South African Police Service 2012).

Second, we start to notice that men and boys are disproportionately represented in such violence, as perpetrators and victims. And after nearly two decades of work with boys and men, as well as laudable gender equality policies and programmes, success in preventing violence, particularly against men and boys, has been minimal (Seedat et al. 2009).

Third, we recognise that reactionary resistance to changing men and boys is often touched on, perhaps often too lightly, in several South African qualitative and ethnographic studies (e.g., Bhana and Pattman 2011; Langa and Kigwua 2013; Naidu and Ngqila 2013). As such, even though it has contributed to literature and practice on gender and sexualities, the body of studies and practical interventions that focus on boys and men is confronted with encumbrances that are hard to overcome.

Given that the ultimate aim of working with boys and men is changing their subjective and social identities, relations with other men, relations with girls and women and the social order, the body of work on boys and men in South Africa may do better by strategising around and working through reactionary resistance. A better understanding of why and how a significant proportion of men resist gender transformation, even where hegemonic masculinity injures them, could contribute toward more effective programming and politics in engaging boys and men toward healthy, caring, pro-feminist masculinities and gender relations.

**Working through resistance in working boys and men**

An array of forces continues to frustrate prospects for comprehensive, swift and concrete changes on gender justice and healthy masculinities. These forces include poverty, unemployment, inequality, race and racism, cultural tradition and gender itself. This is not an exhaustive list, of course, but highlights some of the factors that need closer consideration if work to engage boys and men is to be more effective.

**Working through poverty, unemployment and income inequality in engaging boys and men towards gender equality**

On 10 August, 2012, rock drillers at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana went on a wildcat strike. They demanded a raise in their basic salary to R12,500 (approximately US$1,130 in 2014 terms, where 1 South African Rand is approximately 0.090 US$). They never got what they wanted. The Marikana strike resulted in the deaths of 44 people, mostly mineworkers, killed by the police on 16 August. The tragedy or massacre, as it is variously referred to by different observers, is said to be the single most lethal use of force by the police against civilians in post-apartheid South Africa. In 2014, the mineworkers again went on strike, possibly indicative of continuing struggles around income-related issues such as economic inequality, relative and absolute poverty, decent employment and a living wage.

Commenting in an open editorial on the mineworkers’ strike, Botha and Ratele (2014) noted the absence of analyses and politics that link of the mineworkers’ strike to wider contestations around masculinities. Maintaining that ‘money is central to the definition of what makes men’ powerful or subordinate, they claimed ‘the struggle of the black men at the mines is therefore a struggle for them to be looked upon as worthy men as any others’
Furthermore, they stated: ‘If we continue to delink the struggles of black men for a better salary and ignore the economic inequalities that characterise society, and the low regard by capitalism for anything but capital, we increase the risk of failing to convince black men of the value of gender equality’ (16).

Literature from around the world has supported the contention that economic issues such as employment, decent work, poverty and income inequality are central to a sense of manhood. The generation of monetary income has been shown to be important in the subject position taken by Angolan male war veterans particularly vis-à-vis their wives (Spall 2014). Financial independence and gainful employment is said to central to a sense of manhood in Africa (Barker and Ricardo 2005). The ability to earn a living is among the primary elements regarding what it means to be a grown man in most contemporary societies (Correia and Bannon 2007). Silberschmidt (2011) has contended that ‘poor, frustrated men with no access to income-generating activities’ (99) are unlikely to have any enthusiasm for engaging in gender equality. Her main argument is that while it is argued that gender equality creates development, it is not gender inequality that hampers sustainable poverty reduction and socioeconomic development, but poverty and socioeconomic under-development that are obstacles to gender equality.

In sum, being (un)employed, having a decent income or having money via other means matters both to men and masculinities. A concern with issues of poverty, unemployment and income inequality affects, or should affect, how we approach men and boys in our work. But how employment or lack thereof, poverty and income inequality matter needs close study and with deeper contextualisation. Broadly, though, transforming masculinities and having men support gender justice appears to be related to their opportunities to have decent work, earn money or have other income. Being poor or rich, unemployed or employed and the economic inequality that increasingly characterises the world, cannot be ignored in our engagement with men.

With respect to boys in particular, as an example, poverty, unemployment and income inequality comes into play through their families, cultures and peers. In interacting with their peers, family members and other cultural agents, they learn the role of economic inequalities in gender relations. Once again, it is worth noting that how money-related issues come to matter to how boys think of gender power is not straightforward. In the study referred to earlier by Shefer et al. (2007), boys had an interesting exchange around lobola (bridal gifts, historically cattle and now money) a would-be groom sent to the bride’s family:

Roughly translated:

Respondents: She must do all the chores as I have paid lobola for her.

Respondents: But the person you will hire might seduce you.

Respondents: Helping each other has nothing to do with lobola, it only shows love.

Respondents: So if you make lobola the priority, it means you don’t love you partner.

Respondents: I do love her but she must work.

Respondents: That is totally not a sign of love but abuse.

(also see Shefer et al. 2007, . . , emphasis added)

The main topic of the above interchange was housework. It ends up being about sex, lobola, love, gender relations and a man being able to pay for help. Gender is imbricated with other social and personal issues. And poverty, unemployment and income inequality
are one set of those issues. Getting boys and young men to listen to why gender justice is needed might mean working through issues of poverty, unemployment and income inequality.

Ultimately, it is important to devote more thought to realities around poverty, (un)employment and income inequality as imperatives in working with boys and men. Connecting to, and working with, unemployed and precariously employed men as well as labour unions and government structures on poverty and inequality issues will inform how to better engage men and boys around gender matters.

**Working through racism and racial inequality in engaging boys and men towards gender equality**

Work with boys and men may also want to recognise, develop more sophisticated tools to examine, and challenge the effects of racialised hegemonies and racism in their lives. The main reason is that silence on racial inequality can cast doubt on work on gender inequality. Above all, though, both race and racism are pro-feminist issues.

I have indicated that the subjects of primary interest here are Black heterosexual men and boys and the gender ideologies that interpellate them. The hetero-sexualisation and racialisation of the men and boys (Shefer and Ratele 2011) is a signal to the facts of coloniality and contemporary sexualised racism. Coloniality and racism are entangled with constructions and representations of masculinities, turning some men and boys into objects (as opposed to treating them as fully human) (Fanon 1967/1952). This suggests that engaging boys and men to change hetero-patriarchal and violent forms of masculinity and support gender transformation can never be simply about working toward gender justice. Something more is needed – a focus on the potential or reality of objecthood of some men.

When working with Black men on masculinities and gender relations, questions of the interwovenness of race and racism are likely to materialise, certainly in countries like South Africa. ‘The masculine-feminine dynamic also has racial form’, Gordon (2000, 125) has contended. This dynamic holds for countries that have the experience of racialised imperial and colonial structuring. However, the subtle or gross costs and benefits of race and racism apply to all boys and men in different ways because race and racism position women and men differentially with respect to the ruling patriarchal masculinity in their particular context. All the same, race and racism have bodily resonance for non-Caucasian men in countries such as the Brazil, France, the UK, the USA and South Africa, countries where race has come to play a key role in social and gender relations. At the same time, the issue of migration of differently racialised subjects from the global South to the global North has meant that racial discrimination and racism have become resurgent concerns for many other countries.

Although it is theoretically possible to separate gender from race, in everyday reality, gender relations and identities cannot easily be disentangled from race relations and identities in the lives of Black subjects, similar to what Morrell (2001) has indicated for issues of class and gender among settlers in colonial Natal. A question we might be asked in working with Black boys and men, then, is whether a gender-equal world means one in which white men are equal to Black women, and Black men are equal to White women, and not only intra-racial gender equality. Health-enhancing progressive gender-deconstructive projects therefore need to consider issues around liberating Black masculinities from colonialisit, racialised regimes of power and knowledge as they rub against hetero-patriarchy (Ratele 2013).
Underscoring the racial aspect of masculinities does not imply that women, girls and subordinate men do not experience oppression by hegemonic Black masculinities. It does not mean that male-targeted gender equality interventions focus only on Black boys and men or should not focus on these groups. And it does not indicate that working with racially unmarked ruling masculinities is unproblematic (Morrell 2001). The task is how to retain a commitment to struggles around gender equality with boys and men while recognising the difference that racism and race inequality introduces (Phoenix 2006); in other words, how to analyse the fact of race power in some boys and men’s lives. This suggests, as masculinities scholars have said, the ever-present need to recognise the construction, multiplicity and hierarchy of masculinities within and between societies (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hearn 2006).

Neglecting racism and racialised power in engaging gender and sexuality is not the best way to go about developing healthy black boyhood and manhood. Health-related effects of racism and racial inequality may undermine the work for sexual and gender equality. In the face of racism and racial inequality, it is not an uncommon to hear that struggles for gender equality are a White feminist agenda (Ratele, Shefer, and Botha 2011). Whereas gender-critical work on masculinities shows awareness of the problems boys and men create and experience as a gender and in their sexual relations, we need to better appreciate the struggles of some boys and men around racial marginalisation. Understanding the experience and structures of injustice around race and racism is just as important as understanding structures and experiences around gendered blackness (Clowes 2013).

Work with Black boys and men needs to show that gender and sexual equality and racial equality are not antagonistic. Just as racial equality is incomplete without gender and sexual equality, working with masculinities and men’s sexual health without placing them in the appropriate context of racialised power potentially undermines our efforts. We do not have to completely reinvent ways of doing the kind work that is sensitive to gender and race. Black feminist scholarship has already provided approaches to working in the interstices between gender, sexuality and race (Collins 1989; Crenshaw 1991).

**Working through tradition and culture in engaging boys and men towards gender equality**

Tradition and culture occupy a significant yet largely misrecognised role in the lives of boys and men, as well as women and girls (e.g., Jackson, Ho, and Na 2013; Moolman 2013). Tradition or culture signal self-reflexive symbolic resources through which subjects act as members of in- or out-groups. Accounts of culture or tradition reference how experience, in the context of life with others and shared pasts, is authorised, contested, transmitted, inherited, interpreted and reinvented (Ratele 2013). Such accounts are often encountered in gender work with and on boys and men. This is the case, especially, in a world where culture and tradition have come to occupy a significant place in struggles for land, national freedom, nationhood and citizenship. Tradition and culture are often embraced as a resource by men and women, and boys and girls who may not have access to other vehicles of power. But in much of masculinities studies, tradition, for instance, usually does not make an appearance on its own strength but is often incarnated in the term ‘traditional masculinity’. In other words, there is limited direct examination of men’s gender and men’s tradition. Working towards gender transformation seems to invite those who work with men and masculinities to enter into ongoing discussions around cultures and traditions per se (Mama 2006).
Traditions and cultures are doubtless not fixed, being reinvented over time (Hobsbawm 1983). They are like masculinities and sexualities in that way – continually being performed, remade, contested and changed. Fictional or not, though, we need to concern ourselves with tradition and culture in pro-feminist work because, like gender and sexualities, as discursive and symbolic resources, they are ‘embraced by actors as a frame within which they may choose to act or against which they react’ (Osborne 2008, 284). Spiegel (1989) has argued that:

The notion of tradition as a resource from which ideas for dealing with contemporary situations can be drawn is crucial in that it directs our attention towards analysis of those situations where the process of cultural transmission is actively pursued, i.e. in situations where it may be useful to those who transmit and receive the ideas comprising tradition. (65)

In work to engage men and boys, talk of tradition or culture has to be grasped as signalling their experiences in the context of life with other men and boys, women and girls. In speaking of culture or tradition, men and boys ought to be understood as trying to speak with and of authority, to contest power, to speak of what they may have inherited, how they arrive at their interpretations of the world around themselves. Accounts that reference tradition and culture should alert us to the fact that subjects self-consciously position themselves in relation to a more or less tacitly understood set of beliefs or past. Hence, paying reparative yet critical thought to accounts of and contestations around culture and tradition may be useful in working with men and boys, especially in contexts where tradition and culture are historically colonised or rapidly changing.

**Working through gender in engaging boys and men**

Engaging boys and men is engaging gender. Boys and men, like girls and women, are hailed into gender structures from conception to death. Working with boys and men as boys and men requires a consideration how they comprehend, construct and perform gender in their subjective lives; how they position themselves on the terrain of gender; how masculinities are contested or embraced; and the hierarchies that exist within groups of boys and men. Yet, as Kimmel (2005) noted, ‘though we now know that gender is a central axis around which social life revolves, most men do not know they are gendered beings’ (106). Barker and Ricardo (2005) have maintained that ‘a gender analysis of young men must take into account the plurality of masculinities in sub-Saharan Africa. . . . There is no typical young man in sub-Saharan Africa and no single African version of manhood’ (v). Masculinities do not come in a one-size-fits-all model, and there cannot be a one-size-fits-all intervention when engaging boys and men towards gender justice and transformation of masculinities (Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2014). In any setting or group, several ways of expressing of gender are observable. While this may be commonplace to social constructionism-informed gender interventions (Magnusson and Marecek 2012, 36), spectres of essentialisms continue to haunt societal perceptions of and work with Black men and boys. Sometimes essentialisms slip through in terms such as traditional gender roles, traditional sexual scripts and traditional masculinities. Although masculinity may not be viewed as given with maleness, there is some evidence of an undertow of essentialism whereby gender is viewed as inherent in male bodies and minds.

Those who work with men and boys to different degrees support the thesis that ‘work with men and boys is necessary, can be effective, and can have a positive, transformative impact for the lives of women and girls, but also for the lives of men and boys’ (Minerson et al. 2011, 2). Several interventions from around the world, such as those by the South African organisation Sonke Gender Justice and the Brazilian Promundo, have shown that
boys and men can be engaged to work towards gender equality and equitable decision-making (e.g., Peacock 2012; Ringheim and Feldman-Jacobs 2009; World Health Organization 2007). However, convincing the majority of women and men that that pro-feminist work with boys and men is work towards gender equality still requires effort. There are indications in government policies, civil society projects, political and social activism, as well as in the research literature, that varying and often conflicting understandings exist in working with boys and men precisely entails. The ANC’s Gender Policy Discussion Document has been referred to already. Policymakers, researchers and activists who work with boys and men may need to do more of the kind of persuasion suggested by Minerson et al. (2011) and other authors. First though, we may need to ‘recognize the reasons for resistance to gender equality among men and boys’ as Connell (2003, 10) has argued. And if this is not such an issue in some parts of the world, in many countries in Africa we may need to do more advocacy, lobbying and research to show and convince governments and civil society that ‘men are embedded in gendered systems to the same degree as women’ (Lorentzen 2011, 111).

It was noted earlier that we need to keep engaging with gender in working with boys and men because, although there is much to be found in South African government policies and programmes on gender, boys and men still appear to be considered as less or not as gendered as girls and women. Men tend not to be a target of gender transformation work and initiatives led by government and big business (but boys do fare somewhat better). In South Africa, some non-governmental organisations, like Sonke Gender Justice, are highlighting the need to focus on men (Stern, Peacock, and Alexander 2009). But, generally, gender keeps being fused with being a woman and girl, and boys and men are not considered as so vulnerable to violence and gender-related health problems as women and girls. Characterised by a tendency to gloss contestations among masculinities, the resistance at issue here is encountered in documents from government and its agencies, political parties, non-governmental organisations, as well as from some gender researchers. The construction, multiplicity and hierarchy of masculinities are not adequately incorporated into government policies and programmes.

Given the goal of changing gender power relations, those working with boys and men cannot but engage with discourses on gender that leave out boys and men. They may also want to do more to insert within gender projects the under-recognised impact of heteropatriarchal ideologies and violence on boys and men. They need to find ways to overcome the resistance around the gender of boys and men by providing a more economically, politically, culturally-informed understanding of men’s and boys’ lives in relation to women’s and girls’ (Shefer, Stevens, and Clowes 2010). And it may be that men who work in this area need to learn from and form alliances with women activists, women’s organisations and feminist women interested in boys and men as to how effectively to engage the state, policymakers and other women.

Conclusion
This paper has sought to show that boys and men live within a set of dynamic and usually contradictory social structures, identity networks, interpersonal relationships and material forces that include but exceed gender. These dynamics and contradictions are frequently intensified by processes of marginalisation and subordination. Some of these structures, networks, relationships and forces challenge, complicate and resist efforts to change men and boys. Of special relevance here are income-related issues such as employment, decent work, income poverty and inequality; racism and racial hierarchies and injustices; and
cultural tradition as they intertwine with sexual and gender inequalities. These realities separately, jointly and complexly subvert men’s and boys’ health, just as they undermine women’s and girls’ health. Transforming boys and men suggests working toward health in the thick sense of gender, sexual, racial, economic and cultural wellbeing.

In this paper, I have focused on some of the reactionary resistance as well as the dynamics, contradictions and contestations from individuals and structures that need to be considered and overcome in the work to engage men and boys toward gender justice and egalitarian masculinities. It suggested that those of us who work with boys and men take into account such psychological, institutional and ideological resistance if we hope to liberate masculinities and achieve gender justice. Transforming masculinities and persuading men and boys to work for gender equality requires us to recognise and overcome, and help men and boys recognise and overcome, resistance to gender justice efforts. As Connell (2003) once wrote:

the task for gender equality policy is to recognize the reasons for resistance to gender equality among men and boys, to find answers to the arguments advanced by opponents, and to find better solutions to the underlying social concerns that find expression through resistance to gender equality. (10)

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**Résumé**

Ces vingt dernières années, en Afrique du Sud, les sciences sociales, de la santé et humaines ont été imprégnées du focus sur la remise en question et la transformation des formes dominantes de la masculinité et sur la mobilisation des garçons et des hommes pour l’égalité des genres et des masculinités saines. Ce focus sur les hommes et les garçons s’est également révélé évident dans les actions lancées par les programmes et les activistes. Ce virage ne s’est pas produit sans résistances, contestations et contradictions. Une série de réalités locales et mondiales a contrarié une grande part de l’enthousiasme pour des changements rapides, radicaux et concrets concernant l’équité de genre et la détermination de masculinités progressistes. Les forces discursives et matérielles qui s’opposent aux actions incitant les garçons et les hommes à s’engager sont celles qui sont en rapport avec la question des revenus, la race et le racisme, les traditions culturelles et le genre lui-même. C’est pourquoi nous soutenons que l’implication des garçons et des hommes doit être envisagée, non seulement par rapport aux questions de genre, mais aussi par rapport aux inégalités économiques, à la pauvreté et au chômage, aux divisions ayant les appartenances ethniques pour fondement, et aux conflits liés aux traditions. Cet article traite des forces qui s’opposent aux actions menées auprès des garçons et des hommes, et de la manière selon laquelle nous pourrions faire face à ces résistances.

**Resumen**

En las dos últimas décadas, la importancia de cuestionar y transformar las formas dominantes de masculinidad y la participación de chicos y hombres hacia la igualdad de sexos y las masculinidades saludables es un planteamiento que ha impregnado las ciencias sociales y sanitarias y las humanidades en Sudáfrica. Este planteamiento en hombres y chicos también ha sido evidente en el trabajo de intervenciones y activistas. Sin embargo, la reorientación hacia los chicos, los hombres y las masculinidades no ha ocurrido sin resistencia, confrontaciones y contradicciones. Una serie de realidades localizadas y globales han frustrado gran parte del entusiasmo por los cambios rápidos, radicales y concretos con respecto a la justicia de los géneros y el desarrollo de las masculinidades progresivas. Entre las fuerzas discursivas y materiales que se oponen al trabajo donde participan chicos y hombres existen aquellas que tienen que ver con cuestiones relacionadas con los ingresos, la raza y el racismo, así como las culturas tradicionales y el género. Debido a esto, se sostiene que la
participación de chicos y hombres debe considerarse no solamente teniendo en cuenta el género sino también las desigualdades económicas, la pobreza y el desempleo, divisiones que surgen por la raza y las luchas que giran en torno a la tradición. En este artículo se debaten las fuerzas que contrarrestan el trabajo con chicos y hombres y se analiza cómo podríamos conseguir la participación de hombres y chicos a través de la resistencia.