

## **Engaging Men in the Dialogue on Changing Women's Oppressed Status**

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My name is Rachel Lastinger and I would like to present an abstract for an oral presentation at the ICSD 2016 conference. During this summer, I will be conducting research with a grassroots organization called the Manaleni Achievement Center (MAC) in KwaMhlanga, South Africa. One of our aims for our research this summer is to address the problem of a high dropout rate from school for girls in the community which is being partnered with self-esteem challenges. Through the use of various participatory methods, we hope to discover the root causes to this problem which would aid the MAC in developing a new program to address this problem. Through prior research, the most plausible cause is that KwaMhlanga has a high percentage of incidences of gender-based violence. Another plausible cause is societal gender norms and a history of patriarchy.

These plausible causes are why I believe it will be important to engage the men in this community in the discourses happening around these issues of gender-based violence and patriarchal oppression. Why is it important to engage males in the conversation rather than just talking to and empowering the females who are the ones being directly affected? By engaging men we are more likely to deconstruct the social hierarchies and patriarchal institutions and cultures that allow these gender-based problems to flourish. When it comes to these institutions, both men and women contribute to the maintenance of the status quo, so it is necessary to involve both. By including both genders, one can also more easily make a commitment to changing the ruling idea that masculinity equals dominance, control, and violence and shift towards advancing a positive view of masculinity.

Masculinity can become a characteristic that respects and protects all members of the community without emasculating men. Engaging men and starting to do so at a young age is also important because too many boys are growing up to be men, thinking that violence is normal and indeed expected, and that achieving manhood and being recognized as a man means using violence. A growing topic in sustainable development is the empowerment of women and their access to the market and other resources. Whenever we encounter these women living under oppressive systems, we tend to then seek to empower them and start creating dialogue with them. The problem is that we never talk to the men and we never talk to the male youth whom are the next generation of male leaders. If we want to actually address the oppression of women then we need to be inclusive in our dialogue creation and we need to engage men in the conversation. As men are engaged in the conversations about gender norms and women's rights then we are more likely to see the oppressive system be lifted off of women which would lead to an overall economic growth for the community. The engagement of youth boys in the dialogue on gender norms, gender roles, and self-esteem will be the main innovative research method that I will be putting to use this summer.

