

Author manuscript: Reconstructing Masculinity? A qualitative evaluation of the Stepping Stones and Creating Futures intervention in urban informal settlements in South Africa

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Original article and citation:

Andrew Gibbs, Rachel Jewkes, Yandisa Sikweyiya & Samantha Willan (2014): Reconstructing masculinity? A qualitative evaluation of the Stepping Stones and Creating Futures interventions in urban informal settlements in South Africa, Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care, DOI: 10.1080/13691058.2014.966150

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2014.966150>

Abstract

Evidence shows the importance of working with men to reduce intimate partner violence and HIV-risk. Two claims dominate this work. First, interventions ‘reconstruct’ masculinities; these new formations of masculinity will exist in opposition to existing ones and will be healthier for men and less harmful for women. Second such work needs to work on men’s exclusion from the economy. Using a qualitative longitudinal cohort study of men who participated in a gender transformative and livelihood strengthening intervention and dyadic interviews with men’s main female partners, we explore these claims. Data suggests men saw some improvements in livelihoods and relationships. However, challenging social contexts, including high rates of unemployment, peer networks and a dominant youth masculinity limited change. Rather than reconstructing masculinity a more subtle shift was seen with men moving away from ‘harmful’

aspects of a dominant youth masculinity towards a form of masculinity whereby male power is buttressed by economic provision and attempting to form and support 'households'. Working with men on their livelihoods at an instrumental level encouraged participation in the intervention. Beyond encouragement, men's improving livelihoods afforded men the opportunity to materially demonstrate the social changes - shifts in masculinity - they were seeking to enact.

Key words: violence; IPV; gender; livelihoods; structural; men; HIV; economic

Background

Globally 30 percent of women have experienced sexual and/or physical violence from an intimate partner (IPV) (WHO 2013); the impact of IPV on women's health is wide-ranging, including higher levels of depression and suicidality (WHO 2013) and, in southern and eastern Africa, acquiring HIV (Jewkes et al. 2010).

Reviews emphasise the promising nature of participatory interventions engaging men for gender equality as pathways to reduce IPV and HIV-risk (Dworkin, Treves-Kagan, and Lippman 2013, Barker, Ricardo, and Nascimento 2007). This has led to a significant shift in emphasis of many IPV and HIV-prevention interventions from working only or primarily with women to resist patriarchy to working with men to reduce gender inequalities and their use of violence and risk behaviours.

There is also recognition of how men's investment in gender inequitable masculinities undermines their health and wellbeing (Connell 2005) and how working with men to transform gender inequalities may improve their health. In South Africa, a cross-sectional study explored men's use of condoms; it found men who were more violent and/or gender inequitable were less likely to use condoms than others (Shai et al. 2012). Other work suggests inequitable masculinities limits access to HIV-testing and ART uptake (DiCarlo et al. 2014).

Two claims dominate work to transform men's gender norms and build gender equality. First, through such interventions men will 'reconstruct' their understanding of what it means to be a man. It is assumed these new formations of masculinity will exist in opposition to existing ones and will be healthier for men and less harmful for women (Greig et al. 2008, Dworkin et al. 2013). Indeed, Sweetman, suggests that in such interventions: "These norms [of masculinity]

need to be re-formed, around an ideal of non-violence, building a sense of male pride and dignity based on progressive, gender-equitable ideals.” (Sweetman 2013 p. 5).

Second, interventions working with poor, under- or un-employed men on transforming masculinities need to simultaneously work on men’s economic exclusion from the capitalist system (Silberschmidt 2012, Gibbs et al. 2012, Greig 2009). Research globally traces how men’s violent practices and HIV-related risk behaviours can be partially understood as responses to men’s disenfranchisement from economic processes; such practices are men’s attempt to establish respect and masculinity through a range of alternative and accessible strategies (Silberschmidt 2012, Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014). In turn, authors suggest the need to tackle the multiple-interlocking forms of exclusion men face (Greig 2009). Others go further, suggesting attempts to transform masculinities, without building livelihoods are bound to fail:

“...I seriously doubt that poor, frustrated men with no access to income-generating activities, who are not respected by their wives because of lack of financial support, who are blamed for their extramarital activities, and whose self-esteem and masculinity are at stake, would be interested in the struggle for gender justice and gender equality...But what would interest them is getting access to income-generating activities that would enable them to provide for their families.” (Silberschmidt 2012 p. 99)

While these two claims are central to research and theorisation around masculinities, and transforming gender norms, few studies explore the application of these claims. In South Africa Dworkin et al. (2013) suggested the One Man Can intervention starts to produce new forms of masculinity. Similarly Torres et al. (2013) in Latin America, pointed to how interventions enable a new language of masculinity to emerge.

This study seeks to fill this gap through a longitudinal cohort qualitative study of men involved in a gender-transformative and livelihood strengthening intervention. Data were collected at three time points with the same men enabling an understanding of the differential impacts of the intervention on men and their lives and the fluidity masculinities. In addition, dyadic interviews with men's main female partners were conducted to triangulate experiences.

Context and Methods

In South Africa 23% of households live in informal settlements (HDA 2011). Research was conducted in two urban informal settlements in eThekweni District, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Little Japan was an older, larger settlement, with a mixture of formal government housing and shacks. Located alongside a highway, passing a shopping centre and large township 10 minutes public taxi-ride away, the city centre was a further 15 minutes' drive. The second settlement, Mbazwana was significantly poorer. On a steep hillside and only recently settled, all houses were shacks. It was disconnected from employment opportunities with Durban 45 minutes and two taxis away.

Data shows that informal settlements are overwhelmingly spaces of violence and HIV-risk (Thomas, Vearey, and Mahlangu 2011). In South Africa HIV-prevalence in informal settlements is twice that of formal communities (Shisana et al. 2009). Qualitative research with young people in informal settlements has traced how changing global economic and gender regimes have shaped women's and men's particular vulnerabilities and experiences of IPV and HIV-risk (Gores-Green 2009, Hunter 2005, 2010). Broadly these arguments – building on Connell's (2005) theorising of masculinity – suggest in contexts of poverty and youth unemployment, 'traditional' paths for gaining masculine respect, primarily based on economic provision in relationships, are foreclosed and in turn many young men construct a youth masculinity, with seeks power through readily accessible strategies, primarily control and dominance over

women, other men, and an over-emphasised performance of heterosexuality (Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014, Gores-Green 2009, Hunter 2005).

The Stepping Stones and Creating Futures Intervention

Stepping Stones and Creating Futures is a participatory intervention seeking to reduce IPV and HIV-risk among young people in urban informal settlements through building gender equality and livelihoods. Both interventions draw on Freire (1973) who argues that through dialogue and reflection, people can start to imagine and act on alternative ways of being.

Stepping Stones is a behavioural intervention combining HIV-prevention with the pursuit of greater gender equality. Globally it has shown promise; most notably a randomised controlled trial in rural South Africa showed a 33% reduction in HSV-2 incidence among women and men, and a lower proportion of men reporting perpetration of IPV after two-years and less transactional sex and problem drinking at 12 months (Jewkes et al. 2008). Sessions include communication, assertiveness, reducing gender violence, sex and love. Creating Futures aims to strengthen young people's economic wellbeing through encouraging reflection and skills building (Misselhorn et al. 2014). Topics include: securing and keeping jobs, writing CVs and budgeting and saving. Combined the intervention is 21 sessions, three hours each. Sessions are single sex, with 20 people per group, delivered by a trained peer facilitator.

In 2012 we undertook a pilot of Stepping Stones and Creating Futures in South Africa. We recruited 110 men and 122 women, all out-of-school (average age 21.7 years) into the intervention.

Data

Data comes from a longitudinal cohort study using qualitative in-depth interviews (IDIs) with men and men's main female partners. Before the intervention we randomly selected 20 men, 19 agreed to participate and we undertook IDIs. We sought IDIs with the same men six months and 12 months later. An additional two men, identified through convenience sampling, were included post-intervention to replace those we could not locate and interview. IDIs were conducted by a trained male research assistant.

Baseline interviews focused on the men's lives, how they made a living and their relationships with family, friends and partners, including violence. Six month interviews reviewed these topics and focused on the experience of the intervention, whether they put learnings into action and whether or not these were successful. At 12 months interviews focused on the same topics.

We undertook IDIs with men's main female partners at baseline and 12 months. Access to interview these women was first requested from male partners. We then independently contacted the women and sought their informed consent as autonomous individuals. Many men remained reluctant to allow us to speak to their partners, even after initially agreeing and providing telephone numbers. We chose not to conduct interviews if there was concern about the woman's safety. IDIs with women included a focus on their livelihoods, relationship to their partner and whether they saw any change. A trained female research assistant conducted these interviews (see Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Ethical approval was given by the South African MRC (EC003-175 2/2012) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (HSS/0789/011 and HSS/1273/011D). Written informed consent was obtained from participants. No payment was given for participating in the intervention. However, at each

IDI a small meal was bought by the research assistant and shared to build rapport. Transport costs were reimbursed. Participant and community names have been changed.

Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken in two ways. First a thematic analysis focused on the main domains of change the intervention sought to impact on, specifically livelihoods and gender relationships, was conducted on all 'post-intervention' data to enable thick descriptions of outcomes – essentially a broad overview of the range of outcomes described (Flick 2002).

These are interwoven into the case-studies to provide a broad perspective on the multiplicity of men's descriptions.

As we are concerned with processes of change and how men make sense of their lives we used Lewis' (2007) framework for analysing longitudinal qualitative data. Each participant's corpus of data – including interviews with female partners – was read in their entirety. Case-study summaries were written for each participant describing their lives at each point focused on livelihoods, relationships and masculinity and how they interplayed, with a particular emphasis on points of change, continuity or regression. We purposively selected divergent case-studies to explore the changing dynamics of men's lives, relationships with partners and the impact of their involvement in the intervention (Shirani and Henwood 2011) enabling them to come 'into-dialogue' with one another (Lewis 2007).

Findings: Contrasting trajectories of masculinity

Through four case-studies we explore the processes and sustainability of change resulting from the intervention as well as providing greater detail of outcomes.

Case-Study 1: Vuyo

At baseline Vuyo was living in his partner of four year's (Jabu) single room house; research from South Africa shows generally, women live in men's homes out of economic necessity (Hunter 2010). Yet, this was different for Vuyo as although he did occasional photography work, he was financially dependent on Jabu. As with many young people in urban informal settlements men's collapsing economic position, in contrast to women's strengthening one, led to a relationship with high levels of mistrust (see also Hunter, 2010). Vuyo often refused to talk to Jabu about his life, partly as a way to resist her control, but also potentially expressing insecurity and fears this may make him appear 'unmanly':

Vuyo: Yah I can say the difficulty I faced is it was hard to let my partner know that I was attending this type of intervention, to me that was hard because everything that I was planning I had to involve her too, even though I ended up telling her but to me it was hard. (6 months)

Vuyo's and Jabu's relationship was characterised by high levels of violence and Vuyo often sought other sexual partners. Dominant youth masculinities in these settings emphasised conspicuous demonstrations of violence against female partners and other men, as well as aggressive forms of heterosexuality – all ways young men sought as pathways to achieve respect when other forms linked to economic provision were closed (Gores-Green 2009, Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014).

At 6-months, Vuyo and Jabu reported his attendance at the intervention improved their relationship. Vuyo suggested this was because sessions gave him space to discuss problems he faced, especially around his relationship:

Vuyo: So the thing is what got me involved in this project is that I heard from another guy in my area that there is something happening. So I wanted to go too, because I had a problem with my girlfriend because we were always fighting. When I got there it was

exactly what I was expecting and I decided to stay and attend the sessions hoping I would be alright and I saw that all the things I had problems with were solved (6 months)

Importantly communication in Vuyo's and Jabu's relationship improved; a key aim of Stepping Stones and a potential pathway for reducing violence in relationships (Hatcher et al. 2014).

Vuyo framed this as being able to listen to alternative views:

Vuyo: I can say it's where we were told to treat people close to us well, be it a parent or a girlfriend that actually helps me

Interviewer: How?

Vuyo: I was able to listen to my partner because I never used to listen to her. Like when she wanted me to do something I would end up wanting things to go my way, but now I can listen to her...I was able to be on good terms with her now. There is nothing we complain about, no there is none (6 months)

Improving communication with primary partners was a recurring theme in other men's interviews. Often men contrasted their new found willingness to talk and listen to what they had been like before the intervention. When Mthobisi was asked what he had learnt from the intervention he described this:

Mthobisi: The communication part. It was important to talk to your woman so that everything can go well. I never used to talk, if there was something that pissed me off I would get angry and walk away, but now I can talk about it and then all goes well

Interviewer: What encouraged you to change your behaviour?

Mthobisi: I just told myself that I should put my pride aside (6 months)

Jabu was impressed by the changes she saw while Vuyo attended the intervention. The initial interview with Jabu was a few weeks after the intervention had begun. She identified how he

had changed, their relationship was improving, and Vuyo was less interested in other women. Simultaneously Vuyo also attempted to build his photography business. However, while Vuyo said this improved marginally, he still remained dependent on Jabu.

Participatory interventions create safe social spaces outside of everyday realities enabling people to try out new ways of being and support those attempting to change (Campbell 2003) For Vuyo, the support offered by the 21 sessions were critical to his attempts to change, but he was unable to sustain the change once the intervention finished. Jabu suggested a central reason was that Vuyo still spent time with the same friends:

Jabu: What can I say? He tried to improve while attending, but he didn't change his friends. He went back to his old ways.

Interviewer: What kind of friends does he have?

Jabu: They are not good friends.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Jabu: They me made him smoke. He wasn't a smoker; he loved church.

Interviewer: What does he smoke?

Jabu: He ended up smoking dagga; maybe there are other drugs he smokes that I'm unaware of. His way of thinking has turned into something I don't know. He's very aggressive. (12 months)

While violence had always been a part of Jabu's and Vuyo's relationship, it seemed to escalate culminating in Vuyo threatening Jabu with a knife:

Jabu: I distanced myself from him when he started to change his behaviour. He started carrying knives; if he's in a fight he will pull a knife. I moved away because I feared for my life. (12 months)

Despite some changes, Vuyo described limited changes in his relationship with Jabu, which was also reflected in many men's interviews where they described continuing patterns of gender inequitable behaviours, pointing to the difficulty of behaviour change:

Interviewer: Do you have casual partners you have sex with since the intervention or you have changed?

Nhlanhla: It's difficult for a man to refrain from those kinds of activities. I'm still a ladies man. (12 months)

For Vuyo the intervention provided him with a safe social space to step outside of his everyday constraints and attempt to construct a new relationship with his partner, as well as expand his livelihood. Yet he was unable to sustain these without the support of the intervention and without disengaging from his peers and by 12 months had shifted back into practices more associated with a dominant youth masculinity (Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014, Hunter 2010).

Case-Study 2: Gwedi

At baseline Gwedi had two sources of income; his family who provided food and clothes and selling marijuana. Similar to Vuyo, Gwedi drew on a youth masculinity constructed out of the 'vulnerability' he felt in not being able to provide in relationships, as was 'expected of men', he described the problems this disjuncture caused:

Gwedi: It does a lot, you know we have kids and the baby's mother calls asking for soap, asking for pampers [diapers], whilst you don't have money that is a problem...Or you have a new girlfriend and then you need to call that person and you don't have "*fokol*" nothing, or that girlfriend is visiting you and you don't have money for the drinks or buy her something when she has visited you, and you find that you don't have cash
(baseline)

One way Gwedi described seeking respect was through having multiple-sexual partners; Gwedi was proud of this describing himself as: “a bit of a player” (baseline). Gwedi had a long-term partner of four years (Dedela), with whom he had a child. In addition, he had a second partner who he described as seeing ‘just for sex’. Gwedi used violence against both partners to correct what he perceived as them ‘disrespecting’ him, for example when one refused to have sex, he hit her:

Interviewer: If you wanted to have sex with her and she said no, what would happen?

Gwedi: Well... [Laughing] well... That has happened before

Interviewer: What happened?

Gwedi: I had to lay a hand on her [hit her] because of what she did. She came to my house at night drunk, and I wanted to have sex with her, and she denied me sex... so I beat her up for making a fool of me (baseline)

Gwedi’s attendance at the intervention was mixed; while attending he also undertook temporary work. Despite this Gwedi described attending as a positive experience: “It felt good to go because I had to participate since I was part of the group and work together as a group” (6 months).

In follow-up interviews Gwedi described how he had stopped selling marijuana and continued searching for permanent work. While the intervention encouraged men to seek work, high levels of unemployment meant temporary, unsatisfying work was often all that was available:

Interviewer: How is the success of the way you get money or live on?

Gwedi: What can I say? It’s not much of a success. I just put together because, I don’t have anywhere else where I work. I work if a job opportunity arises.

Interviewer: What difficulties do you come across?

Gwedi: The problems I face are I don't work every day... That is a difficulty I face. Even if I get money, it's only for three days. That's how it is, my brother. (12 months)

Many men reported like Gwedi that despite seeking work, in many cases it was simply not available:

Khulekani: What has not changed is that I have not found a job...

Interviewer: Why have you not found a job?

Khulekani: Like yesterday I sent my CV and I still am sending CVs but I have not had any responses... (6 months)

At the same time as Gwedi moved into legal, albeit temporary, employment, his relationship with Dedela improved. Dedela and Gwedi reported less violence in their relationship, partly linked to improved communication:

Interviewer: Have you hit your girlfriend since you attended the intervention?

Gwedi: No, I last hit her before attending.

Interviewer: What made you to change?

Gwedi: I realised that it was not helping. You can be physical but not stop her from what she wants to do. You hit her now, but you don't know what she does when she's not around you.

Interviewer: How do you control your emotions if she gets to you?

Gwedi: I speak with her about what I don't like and suggest the right way to do it (12 months)

Dedela also reported changes in her relationship with Gwedi. She tied this to Gwedi changing his friends and spending less time drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana, pointing to the clustered nature of risk behaviours (Hatcher et al. 2014):

Dedela: I don't know exactly when he started changing. I heard about his attendance, after he had already started. He has distanced himself from lot of things.

Interviewer: Can you name few of his previous behaviors?

Dedela: He had many female partners, but not now and he's no longer a heavy drinker of alcohol, he has also decreased his marijuana intake. He reduced it to one smoke a day. I told him to stop completely, because I don't like it. He said it's not easy to quit (12 months)

Gwedi and Dedela described how they spent more time together, yet while showing a new relationship forming, Gwedi also used it to control Dedela, something he had previously also done: "I always want to know where she is and, if she's not in her house, I want to know where she is" (12 months). Many men like Gwedi, continued to describe needing to know where their partner was at all times, again illustrating that change is difficult. Yet simultaneously, Gwedi also started thinking about male power differently:

Gwedi: When I listened to what they were saying at the intervention. I realised that it was informative. A man should respect himself and others, not think that his powers entitles him to do otherwise. (12 months)

Gwedi's attempts to change, to become a more engaged partner, secure work and reduce drinking, drugs and multiple-partners were not easy. The dense networks supporting him before the intervention held back his change. Gwedi described how as he stepped away from these networks his peers became jealous of him and one stabbed him:

Interviewer: Have you talked about this programme with your friends?

Gwedi: Yes I told them about it

Interviewer: How are they responding to your change?

Gwedi: They are jealous because they can see that I am not hanging out with them anymore, I am now hustling on my own. In the past few months I have been injured - I was stabbed by one of them, because of the jealousy. Because they see my new lifestyle, they wish I was still hustling with them doing wrong things (6 months)

For Gwedi the impact of the intervention was mixed, while his income did not necessarily improve, he reoriented himself towards seeking work, distancing himself from peers and also started to negotiate a new relationship with his partner that was less violent and more supportive.

Case-Study 3: Thabo

The case-study of Thabo shows a young man slowly establishing himself economically and in so doing being able to play a larger and more supportive role with his partner and their child. At baseline Thabo described taking piece jobs, ranging from cleaning yards to working in a fish factory. Financially his grandmother supported him, contrasting with young men's expectations of financial independence. Similar to others, Thabo described his use of violence against his partner as an attempt to 'discipline' her in essence asserting his power over her in the absence of economic power and his inability to control her, shown by her perceived infidelity:

Thabo: Yes I've hit my girlfriend, my current one

Interviewer: What caused you to hit your girlfriend?

Thabo: I found a message from a guy that was asking her out at that time

Interviewer: So you gave her a beating?

Thabo: [laughing], the thing is when she finds messages on my phone, she sends her sisters to shout at me telling me that I am cheating on her and all that. So when I found that message I beat her up. (Baseline)

Thabo described how he benefitted from the intervention. From Stepping Stones he emphasised how he 'learnt' to exit potentially confrontational situations: "I walk away, because I know I have a very short temper" (12 months). More widely, he learnt to express his emotions, contrary to the silent and unexpressive masculinities of many men (Seidler 2005):

Thabo: Now we ask each other about what we both love. And she tells me how she loves me and I tell her how much I love her (12 months)

Thabo continued, describing how this was not simply a new form of caring relationship emerging, but linked to his improving economic position, enabling him to demonstrate his love through providing in his relationship. Hunter (2010) argues, love in modern South Africa is a combination of romantic love and material provision. As Thabo managed to secure a formal shop job, with regular pay, he could start to provide the material aspects required for love:

Thabo: Well I do try to give her gifts. I bring her something nice that will bring a smile in her face

Interviewer: So you bring her gifts?

Thabo: Yes the thing is she does not like chocolate. Let's say I bring her a card or and some cakes wrap them nicely and also bring her some chips and ice cream wrapped nicely it sits well with her, because when she opens it she starts to smile...(12 months)

More widely, increasing earnings meant Thabo felt more confident and self-assured. He was able to buy things for his child and himself and was not dependent on his grandmother:

Interviewer: How successful is the way you make a living?

Thabo: [excited] It is very successful because now I am able to buy myself my own things and for my baby. I don't ask for it.

Interviewer: So you're not bothering your grandmother anymore?

Thabo: [laughs proudly] No I don't (12 months)

Thabo's relationship improved because of the interaction between his attempts to change his identity and relationship with his partner, alongside his improving material reality that enabled him to practically demonstrate this. He started to reject aspects of the dominant youth masculinity and move towards a 'traditional' masculinity founded more on economic provision (Hunter 2010).

Case-Study 4: Mondli

As with Thabo, Mondli's case-study points towards the interlinked nature of changing gender norms and improving economic wellbeing. The safe space the intervention created, enabled Mondli to talk about his problems with others who faced similar issues:

Mondli: It was the first time I have ever attended workshops about things that were relevant to me...as a person the less you talk about it the more it eats you within. When I ended up talking about things that were bothering me, I then felt better because it was something big to me which I could not tell just anybody, but I told people and I was okay after that (6 months)

Over the year Mondli's work and financial situation improved. At baseline work involved occasionally providing music at parties. The intervention inspired Mondli to look for work. Initially it was temporary work with courier companies, but by 12 months he had secured himself a relatively permanent position at an electricity company.

An on-going concern about building men's livelihoods is that they will spend extra income on alcohol and sex (Gibbs et al. 2012). Rather Mondli, after hearing how other men in his group saved small amounts, opened a Post Office Savings Account with his partner, and saved money

there for their child's future. Others similarly described how they began saving money following participation in the intervention:

Bulelani: I have been saving money since last year, since the project started. I saved some money so I can be able to sell things like fried chips, cold drinks, so I can make a living for now.

Interviewer: So how successful is the way you make a living?

Bulelani: Ever since I started doing this business I have seen a lot of progress. I see if I carry on there is a lot of things that can start unfolding and all the things I want will happen (12 months)

Mondli, as with Thabo, also emphasised additional money he earned was primarily spent on his partner and child, born just after the intervention:

Interviewer: What do you spend your extra income on?

Mondli: I spend it a lot on the baby

Interviewer: On the baby?

Mondli: Yes and on the baby's mother

Interviewer: What do you spend it on?

Mondli: Clothes, food, and on the baby's mother it's the cosmetics, clothes, for doing her hair and all that. (12 months)

The impact of Mondli's increased income, particularly his choice of spending it on his partner and child, paralleled other improvements in their relationship; at root Mondli's decision to financially provide for his child and partner, made him a more desirable partner. In one sense he started to replace one form of masculinity and power over women, which prioritised strategies of violence and emphasised heterosexuality, with another in which power was secured by economic provision.

Mondli also became an engaged father with his young child out of choice, rather than necessity. Choosing to actively father has been suggested as a pathway into gender equitable relationships (Morrell and Jewkes 2011). Throughout the interview, Thembeke mentioned how Mondli was an engaged father:

Interviewer: What does he say about being a father?

Thembeke: I can tell he's happy. He rushed the birth of the child. He wanted to take care of her...

Interviewer: How often does he [Mondli] see the baby?

Thembeke: A day doesn't go by without him visiting the baby. He sometimes stays with her if he doesn't have anywhere to go. (12 months)

Mondli became committed to securing his position and future in his relationship with Thembeke and his child, most clearly signified through him saving up and paying 'damages' for conceiving a baby with Thembeke when not married. This is a symbolically important move as it would secure his ability to give the baby his name and be recognised as the father by her family. Immediately after the intervention, Mondli said this was what he wanted to do: "I want by next year to pay for the baby damages" (6 months). Six months later, with improved employment and saving, he paid his partner's parents the 'damages' he owed: "I am able to buy bigger things and I am able to make plans and I have been able to pay for impregnating my girlfriend" (12 months). Through this economic transaction he staked a social claim over the child, as well as making a social claim about their future (Hunter, 2010). For Mondli the shifts seen were not simply about an improved relationship with his partner and greater financial resources, it was also a social transition whereby Mondli started to position himself within a different masculinity, moving from a dominant youth masculinity, and starting to draw on aspects of a 'traditional' masculinity.

Discussion: the pathways and limits of gender transformation?

This study traced the impact on young men's lives through participating in Stepping Stones and Creating Futures. Central to process of change, as the case-studies highlighted was that the intervention created safe social spaces for dialogue and critical thinking. This enabled men to come together to discuss challenges they faced, which was otherwise unlikely given the ways in which the dominant youth masculinity in this setting emphasised toughness and emotional control (Seidler 2005, Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014) and is central to theorisation on behaviour change in masculinities research (Barker, Ricardo, and Nascimento 2007, Campbell 2003, Dworkin et al. 2013). For those men inclined to change, this may have been important in demonstrating acceptance of, and validation for, alternative masculinities by other men who were also part of the intervention. Whether it was the content of the intervention that was critical for supporting change or simply the process of providing safe social spaces for men to come together and talk about their lives is unclear. Unravelling these complexities requires further research and theorization around participatory interventions.

A key outcome of some men's engagement in the intervention was increasing participation in the formal and informal economy. Many saw improved incomes, which combined with new strategies around saving and budgeting led some to build economic capital. The case-studies suggested that while some found new forms of work, many continued in low-paying "demeaning" work, suggesting they may have become more willing to accept such work given how it could be a 'springboard' to wider life objectives.

Other important outcomes described were shifts in gender norms and relationships. A central aim of the intervention was to reduce IPV and the case-studies suggest this may have happened, alongside improved communication and avoiding conflict. More widely, there

emerged some more 'progressive' outcomes, such as critical thinking about power in relationships - a critical precursor to change (Campbell 2003) and engaged fathering, behaviors which are fundamentally important in challenging dominant narratives of masculinity (Morrell and Jewkes 2011). Yet, at the same time, many men continued to exert subtle forms of control over their partners, particularly through needing to know where their partners were and some men continued to seek multiple-sexual partners and described how they continued to use violence against partners.

We suggested there were two claims made about interventions working with men and masculinities. First they introduce radical new forms of gender equitable masculinity. The case-studies suggest this did not happen. Rather, a subtle shift was seen with men moving away from more 'harmful' aspects of a youth masculinity, prioritising violence and emphasised heterosexuality (Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014) towards drawing on a form of masculinity in which male power is buttressed by economic provision and sustaining stable 'households', broadly appropriating aspects of a 'traditional' masculinity (Hunter 2010). Similar to Jewkes, Wood, and Duvury (2010) analysis of Stepping Stones, these forms of masculine practice were less violent and more concerned about reducing risk, but not radical new forms of gender equitable masculinity. Instead they drew on aspects of masculinity already existing within the wider social context. While certainly less violent, these masculinities also supported a subtle pattern of patriarchal power in which overt violence and control was replaced by control through economic provision and social hegemony (Connell 2005).

However, the intervention also engendered aspects of more gender equitable masculinities suggesting this was not simply the replacement of one form of patriarchal power with another. While not overstating these pockets of radical change, some men's emphasis on engaged fathering, expressing emotions and critical thinking about power in relationships, certainly

challenged dominant ideas about masculinity, going beyond both the youth and 'traditional' masculinities. These pockets may, in time, produce potential for more radical gender change to emerge.

The second claim was that building men's economic livelihoods, while working on gender equality, is critical for success of such interventions. In its starkest form, this assertion is rather undermined by the first Stepping Stones RCT in rural South Africa which showed a reduction in school-going men's violence without an economic intervention (Jewkes et al. 2008). Perhaps a different question is whether it appears intervening on socio-economic circumstances assists these changes. We found at an instrumental level, our older men – compared to the Stepping Stones RCT where 80% of men were 15-19, compared to our study where 80% were aged 18-24 - did participate and appreciated the intervention focusing on strengthening their livelihoods, a key priority for them. Beyond encouraging engagement, men's improving livelihoods appeared to afford men the opportunity to materially demonstrate social changes - shifts in identity - they were seeking to enact. Men's attempts to move from a youth masculinity towards aspects of a 'traditional' masculine identity was supported when they could materially demonstrate this shift, through being able to provide in relationships, paying 'damages' for pregnancies outside of marriage and becoming independent through work.

Yet, not all men sought to enact such changes, nor could all men who attempted to change sustain them. The case-studies highlighted the challenging social environments young men lived in. High levels of poverty, widespread unemployment, peer networks that focus on alcohol and drug use and widespread patriarchal norms, all contributed to some men not changing. Furthermore, many were highly invested in the dominant youth masculinity and simply may not have wished to change. Brief interventions such as Stepping Stones and Creating Futures remain critical for those whom it does impact on, however, the embedded nature of violence and

HIV-risk behaviours rooted in patriarchal social norms and economic marginalisation continues to require broader restructuring of economic and gender power (Connell 2005, Greig 2009).

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Table 1: Data collected for study

			Men			Female Partners	
		Demographic information at baseline	Baseline	6 months	12 months	Baseline	12 months
1	Bheka	Aged 27. Temporary formal work. Two regular, long-term partners.	X	X	X	Nombuso	
2	Dumisani	Aged 21. Irregular work. Regular partner.	X	X	X		
3	Gwedi	Aged 23. Sells marijuana and supported by family. Two regular partners, one long-term, one more casual.	X	X	X		Dedela
4	Bulelani	Aged 20. Sells food and cigarettes at side of road. Long-term partner, occasional casual partners.	X	X	X		Veliswa
5	Goodman	Aged 22. No job, supported by mother. Long-term partner, many casual partners.	X	X	X		Nombini
6	Vusi	Aged 21. No job, supported by mother	X	X	X		

		and uncle. One regular partner.					
7	Mthobisi	Aged 20. No job, supported by sister. Lives with regular partner.	X	X	X		Nompu
8	Mboniswa	Aged 21. No job, supported by mother. One long-term partner.	X	X	X		Zinzi
9	Khulekani	Aged 25. Short term construction work. Regular partner, on and off relationship.	X	X	X	Nonhlanla	Nonhlanla
10	Vuyo	Aged 22. Supported by girlfriend and occasional work. Long term partner and occasional casual partners.	X	X	X	Jabu	Jabu
11	Mandla	Aged 22. Works part-time at a restaurant. Has two regular partners, one in area and one in rural area.	X	X	X	Nosipho	Nosipho
12	Wiseman	Aged 26. Sells food and sweets by roadside. One regular partner and occasional casual relationships.	X	X	X	Nomusa	
13	Mondli	Aged 25. Occasionally provides music at parties. One regular partner.	X	X	X	Thembeke	Thembeke

14	Thabo	Aged 23. Temporary piece work. One long-term partner, plus one shorter but regular partner.	X	X	X	Gugu	Zinhle
15	Lindani	Aged 24. Temporary construction work. Long-term partner, plus shorter term relationships with women and casual partners.	X	X	X		
16	Abelo	Aged 21. Occasionally works as a taxi assistant. Main partner and casual partners.	X		X		
17	Thokozani	Aged 19. No job, supported by mother. One long-term partner.	X		X	Zodwa	Zodwa
18	Sandile	Aged 21. Temporary work in factories. One long-term partner.	X				
19	Bongani	Aged 24. Occasional attempts to start small business. Regular partner and casual partners.	X				
20	Nhlanhla	Aged 22. No job, supported by family.		X	X		

		Regular partner and occasional casual partners.					
21	Siphamandla	Aged 21. Temporary piece work. Regular partner and casual partners.		X			