

# *Digital Portraits of Masculinity in Rural South Africa:*

Engaging Men in Family Planning  
and HIV Prevention By Producing  
and Sharing Personal Stories

Amy L. Hill, MA  
Center for Digital Storytelling's *Silence Speaks* Initiative

Dean Peacock, MSW  
Sonke Gender Justice Network

# Background/Significance

- Engaging men is key to the success of efforts to promote family planning, HIV & AIDS prevention, and gender equality.
- Sonke's research and intervention with rural South African men shows that they often avoid visiting clinics and using condoms due to persistent beliefs about masculinity.
- Geography, poverty, language constraints, and education levels present distinct challenges to the provision/accessing appropriate of health information/services for men.
- Portrayals of men in mainstream media often suggest that *all* men are irresponsible and violent, which can reinforce defensive attitudes and impede change.

# Intervention

- Based on the recognition that every-day stories of evolving masculinities have the potential to shift individual behaviors, community norms, and institutional policies and practices
- Goal: to make *local* voices and images the centrepiece of *local* efforts promoting new visions of masculinity and gender equality in South Africa.
- Collaboration with *Silence Speaks*, an international digital storytelling initiative offering a safe, supportive environment for sharing and bearing witness to stories that too often remain unspoken, resulting in short digital videos.

# Methodology

- Five workshops with adults and youth, in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo provinces.
- Practice developed at the Center for Digital Storytelling and adapted for rural settings by *Silence Speaks*; blends testimonio/oral history; participatory video/Photovoice; and popular education.
- Participants share and record stories; gather/create images; and provide input into editing/learn to edit their own stories.
- Stories are shared as part of rural education and mobilization activities carried out by Sonke Community Action Teams.

# Findings/Lessons Learned

- Large-scale research project being carried out in 2010 by UCSF will assess impact of local story sharing.
- In environments where material and health needs are urgent, questions about who benefits from media-making and in what ways must be carefully addressed.
- Workshop recruitment and teaching processes must reflect close attention to ethical issues related to informed consent, safety/emotional readiness, privacy protection, and the implications of representing personal stories and bringing them into the public sphere.

# For More Information:

Amy Hill

[amylenita@storycenter.org](mailto:amylenita@storycenter.org)

[www.silencespeaks.org](http://www.silencespeaks.org)

Dean Peacock

[dean@genderjustice.org.za](mailto:dean@genderjustice.org.za)

<http://www.genderjustice.org.za/projects/digital-stories.html>