

## **Disrupting Patriarchy: Transforming Gender Oppression through Dialogue between Women and Men at a South African University**

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**Abstract :** On international levels and across disciplines gender scholars have argued that patriarchal scripts of masculinity and femininity are harmful as they negatively impact constructions of selfhood and relations between women and men. Patriarchal ideologies serve as a scaffolding for dominance and subordination and fuel violence against women. Toxic masculinity—social discourses of men as violent, unemotional, and sexually dominant—are embedded in South African culture and are rooted in the high rates of gender violence occurring in the country. Finding strategies that can open up space for the interrogation of toxic masculinity is crucial in order to disrupt the destructive consequences of patriarchy in educational and social contexts. The University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa in collaboration with the non-profit organization Gender Reconciliation International conducted a year-long series of workshops with male and female students. The aim of these workshops was to facilitate healing between men and women through collective dialogue processes. Drawing on a collective biography methodology outlined by feminist poststructuralists, this paper explores the impact of these workshops on gender relations. Findings show that the students experienced significant psychological connections with others during these dialogues, through which they began to interrogate their own gendered conditioning and harmful patriarchal assumptions and practices. This paper enhances insights into the possibilities for disrupting patriarchy in South African universities through feminist collective research efforts.

**Keywords :** collective biography methodology, South Africa, toxic masculinity, transforming gender oppression, violence against women

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