

MASCULINITY, SEXUALITY AND THE BODY OF MALE SOLDIERS

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Abstract.

Considering that social identities such as gender, culture, race, age and class play a major role in constructing masculinity, this paper looks at how these intersect with the body and what discourses of masculinity and sexualities are in evidence in this respect in the overtly masculinist context of the military. Drawing on data from a larger study exploring 14 military men's narratives on their masculinity, sexuality, sexual relationships and HIV/AIDS, the findings illustrate how successful masculinity in the military context is played out through particular bodily performances, including being physically strong, proving one's strength through high risk military activities, and through hypersexuality. There is evidence that the body and other bodily representations and accessories related to being in the military (uniform, weapons, etc.) is a key area in which masculine identity is performed by men in this institution. The suggestion is that male sexual practices cannot be tackled without examining the intersection of the body and masculine identity and in the military this means a particular focus on the way in which the body is centred in performances and representations of being both a military person and a man.

Key words: *military, South Africa, HIV/AIDS, hegemonic masculinity, (hetero)sexuality, bodies*

INTRODUCTION.

Underpinned by a social constructionist and critical men's studies approach this paper explores how men in the military construct their masculinity/ies in relation to their bodies. These approaches argue that the gender identities and performances of men are socially constructed, changeable and often contradictory, hence the term "masculinities" rather than a single "masculinity" (Morrell, 1998, 2002; Moynihan, 1998; Connell, 2000). National and international critical men's studies emphasise the importance of looking at both local and global contexts when exploring masculinities. This study, though not discarding the importance of global contexts, privileges the local institutional context. Interpretation is focused on the manner in which soldiers in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) construct their masculinity and sexuality and the role that the body and bodily representation play in the construction of their masculinity and sexuality, which in turn are located within the military context and are located within the performance of various military activities.

While the approaches and theories underpinning this study firmly reject biological determinist positions, they nonetheless acknowledge and theorise the centrality of the body and the physical in understanding dominant performances of masculinity. This is especially salient in understanding the way in which strength and virility have been widely shown to be integral components in the construction of hegemonic forms of masculinity that are arguably amplified by men in the military (Connell, 1994, 2000; Hearn, 1996; Cock, 2001). In this context, men's bodies which are expected to be tough, muscular and macho in many cultural contexts are particularly central, valued and associated with social and sexual success in military contexts (Kimmel, 2000; Cock, 2001). This article attempts to look at how a group of military men's constructions of masculinity intersects with discourses about the body specifically in the overtly masculinist context of the military which is itself centred about physicality. The article begins by contextualizing the focus in the article through a brief history of the South African military and its post-apartheid transformation before turning to a theoretical overview of the role of the body in the social construction of masculinity. The article then goes on to outline the study and unpack the key discourses that reflect the ways in which dominant discourses of masculinity intersect with discourses on the body and physicality for this group of military men.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY.

The South African Defence Force (SADF) had extensive operational deployment experience inside the country. In the 1970s compulsory military service for young, fit and white South African men was introduced. During the 1980s, the SADF took on increasing responsibility for internal security matters, providing the South African Police (SAP) with considerable support in their attempt to crush anti-apartheid resistance (Stott, 2002). Many SADF conscripts emphasised that the core of military training was to inculcate aggressiveness and to equate it with masculinity (Cock, 2001).

On the eve of the first democratic general election in 1994, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) replaced the SADF. This new structure emerged from the decision to integrate the non-statutory forces of Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) with the SADF and the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC) forces (Seegers, 1996; Le Roux, 2003). The transition from the SADF to the SANDF has been tremendously complicated and marred by tension and dissatisfaction (Stott, 2002; Le Roux, 2003; Ngculu, 2003). The short- and long-term process of replacing the SADF with a truly national defence force comprising statutory and non-statutory forces that had been at war for 37 years, was complex.

While literature analyzing current constructions of gender in the military is scarce there is some work that highlights the centrality of the body. Barrett (1996) has argued that while the military emphasizes aggression and physical fitness, the qualities of a "gentleman" hinging around discourses of cleanliness, a neat appearance and showing attention to detail are also values that the military seeks to impart. It is also notable that even though the SANDF largely maintains a masculinised body, in contrast to the SADF, a fairly large proportion of the members of the new South African military are women.

Given the above historical context, the South African military is not unified or a homogenous structure. It is stratified across race, gender and class, though its primary identifier remains a masculinist tradition. Understanding the way in which the body may have been foregrounded in military institutions requires engaging with theoretical arguments about the way in which the body and bodily performance has been centred in social constructions of hegemonic masculinity, highlighting arguments about the particular forms this may take in the hypermasculine, physicalist context of the military.

MASCULINITY AND THE BODY.

Connell (1994) criticises the neglect of the body in theorising gender in terms of the sex-gender conceptual divide, which emerges from the philosophical mind-body tradition, and intersects with other classic binary opposites like male-female and rational-irrational. Connell's concern about the neglect of the body is shared by other researchers (Vance, 1989; Crossley, 1996; Dowsett, 1996) who appeal for acknowledgement of the body as an active agent in shaping sexualities, genders and social processes. These researchers argue not only for the body's agency in social practice, but also for the material diversity of bodies: "This point is nowhere more important than in relation to gender. Gender is fundamentally a way in which social practice is ordered. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is ordered in relation to a reproductive arena...This arena includes sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth and infant care, bodily sex difference and similarity. It is thus constituted by the materiality of bodies" (Connell, 2000:58-59).

This does not mean these researchers favour deterministic discourses over socio-cultural accounts of gender. Rather, the notion of "embodiment" is central to a number of contemporary theoretical perspectives and feminist writings that contribute to understanding human subjectivity (Jung, 1996; Potts, 2001; Somerville, 2004). If men's bodies are inextricably relevant to masculinity, then to understand how their bodies intersect with their masculinities, "we must not abandon the conventional dichotomy between changing culture and unchanging bodies" (Connell, 2000:57). Echoing Foucault's (1984) account of the way in which bodies are regulated and disciplined within socio-cultural and historical processes, Connell argues that social institutions and discourses have given particular social meaning to gendered bodies.

A range of bodily practices located in particular social contexts – ranging across dress, sport and sexuality – address or modify bodies. Broadly, the terms of masculinity require men to have a high level of muscular strength. This suggests that men should be physically fit and well built (Klein, 1999; GETNET, 2001). Therefore, the body is key in the construction of successful masculinity (Connell, 2000; Dowsett, 2003; Lindegger & Maxwell, 2007). Bodies in this view have moved beyond biology, and play a crucial role in how people construct their masculinity and how they behave/act in their social surroundings. Within this framework the centrality of bodies and physicality, particularly the desired strong physique and the symbolic role of the uniform in the military are clearly of relevance in understanding the discursive function of body in constructions of military and masculine identity.

Masculine body and the military.

Much literature has foregrounded the way in which bodily strength and physicality is performed in the military. For some men, the physical training that produces the physical fitness required by the military seems to be a way of reasserting their

manhood, or proving their masculinity (Cohn, 2000). For some, military service is an inherent part of maturation, a ceremonial transition to successful male adulthood (Klein, 1999). The military embodies codes of honour that stress a number of supposedly male virtues. Traditional male virtues or attributes, such as risk-taking, honour, courage, adventurousness, heroism and sexual virility are central to constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Enloe, 1988; Nagel, 1998; Cheng, 1999; Martino, 1999; Heinecken, 2000). These virtues are supposedly tempered with restraint and dignity, so as to reflect masculine ideals such as liberty, equality and fraternity (Nagel, 1998). The demands of soldiering require these manly virtues and the concepts of bravery, fearlessness and persistence to be brought together (UNAIDS, 1998; Heinecken, 2000). Attaining this masculine ideal appears to hinge around soldiers' material bodies.

Furthermore, attainment of masculine identity in the military depends on a soldier's emotional "maturity". The military-masculine ideology discourages military personnel from admitting they are emotionally vulnerable as this is potentially threatening to military morale, hence the ascendance of phrases such as "behave like a soldier" or "take it like a man". Given that the central function of the military is the preparation for and implementation of military combat, it could be argued that the institutional context of the military legitimises and idealises violence, serving to "groom" male bodies for violence (Cock, 2001; Agostino, 2003). Emotional and physical vulnerability is therefore not tolerated in the military. It is not only physical strength that is key in the bodily representation of the military but also the use of weapons viewed as an extension of the body for military men. Writing about the South African military, Cock (2001) argues that guns are a key feature of hegemonic masculinity in this context.

A strong association between the military context and high-risk sexual practices have also been widely argued, with a number of authors arguing that the hypermasculine context of the military and other aspects of the lived experience of being in the military facilitates a particular vulnerability to unsafe sexual practices. Okee-Obereng, (2001) confirms that there is an association between work in the military and high-risk sexual activity. UNAIDS (1998:3) reported that "the military professional ethos tends to excuse or even encourage risk-taking". Aggression is valued and is associated with "conquest". Willingness to accept and take risks is the key feature in a soldier's preparation for combat, but off the battlefield it might vicariously motivate soldiers' willingness to engage in needlessly risky behaviour, such as unprotected sex. Nkosi's (1999:167) quotation from a Malawian soldier demonstrates the centrality of the male sexual body and performance in the identity of the military man poignantly: "Soldiers like to conquer. The more women you take to bed the more you feel like a real man."

The above literature highlights the centrality of physical strength, risk-taking, sexual virility, all part of the embodiment of masculinity and how hegemonic masculinity and particular forms of idealised male bodies are central to and exaggerated in military settings.

The opposite side of the coin with respect to the centrality of the body in masculine achievement is the way in which female soldiers are problematised in the military, which further highlights the way in which it is a specifically male body that is key to constructions of success in the military, adding further impetus to the argument of the centrality of the body in constructions of military masculinity.

The feminine body and the military.

Women have almost universally been excluded from warfare. In the first instance, their biological role (bearing children) and gender roles (raising and caring for children) were viewed as the inhibiting forces within a patriarchal notion of the military. The traditional belief in both military and civilian spheres is that men are protectors and defenders of the country, women and children. The key underlying argument is that if women die in war, there will be no one to fulfil their traditional reproductive roles.

“New lives can be created, but it takes one woman to bear each child each year, while one man can father a larger number of children a year. Numerous women are essential to the replenishment of a population, but only a few men are required” (Steihm, 1980:56).

This seems to be a good argument for polygamy and the prospect of a patriarchal dividend for the successful surviving warrior. This is in line with sex role theory whereby men’s bodies are seen as the only ones that should be placed in risky situations, and emerges from old forms of sexist discourse based on notions that women are the weaker sex while men are considered strong and brave (Weitzman, 1979; Agostino, 2003). Another common concern raised is that if women take part in combat, men will concentrate more on defending them from their common opponents instead of fighting their counterparts (Agostino, 2003), again highlighting the patriarchal discourse of men as women’s protectors.

Similarly, sexist notions of women as physically lacking in relation to men abound in military discourse. Women are described as not having the ability to perform military tasks that require a high level of muscular strength, such as, for example, the carrying of heavy equipment and fighting in war, hence many countries have suggested that women should participate in combat (Presidential Commission, 1992). South Africa is no different; it has also restricted women from combat. However, Article 9 of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) instructed that women should be afforded equal opportunities in, and to, all roles.

It is evident that while women are admitted into the military and lip-service is paid to their achieving equal opportunities, the dominant discourse remains one in which both male and female bodies are constructed as fixed essences. The exclusion of women from most aspects of the military is rationalised in terms of women’s physical deficits and assumed masculine power which is constructed as naturally invested only in male bodies. This construction leaves no or little space for women to be fully integrated and accepted in the military, as male bodies are viewed within dominant cultural discourses as superior to female bodies with respect to required performances for the military role (Agostino, 2003).

While the literature flags the body as a key terrain for the performance of masculinity in and outside of military contexts, there is little work that specifically explores discourses of the male body among military men. This article emerges out of a larger study that attempted to understand social constructions of masculinity and sexuality among a group of military men in the South African military.

METHODOLOGY.

A qualitative, feminist study looking at how men in the military construct their masculinity and how their constructions reportedly link with sexual practices was conducted with a group of male soldiers in a South African military institution. The method used is an analysis and interpretation of 14 transcribed individual in-depth interviews with male soldiers enrolled in a tertiary institution pursuing a career in the military. As the participants were students, they were all junior officers with ranks ranging from lieutenant to captain. All participants had been in the military for more than four years. The participants were between the ages of 24 to 33 years, a group regarded as sexually active and at high risk of HIV infection (Heinecken, 2001). Twelve participants were single, two were married. They all identified themselves as heterosexuals. While acknowledging that there are multiple forms of sexual identity and sexual practice, heterosexuality became the point of departure in this article as the military setting is dominated by heteronormative practices of masculine (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe & Thomson, 1996). This is in line with local research indicating that the social construction of dominant masculinity is powerfully based on the successful performance of heterosexual prowess (for example, Hunt, 1989; Campbell, 2001; Dunbar-Moodie, 2001).

There were seven African participants, four whites and three coloureds¹. Representivity during sampling is not regarded as crucial when doing qualitative research. However, the decision was taken to consider a sample that represents some of South African diversity with respect to categories set up by apartheid and still of salience in the construction of identity today. This decision was based on the assumption that a diverse sample might facilitate the possibility of diverse stories and narratives being heard which could contribute significantly to the nature and content of future HIV/AIDS interventions.

It is worth highlighting by way of illustrating the diversity of the narratives across historical apartheid categories that white participants joined the military for different reasons than African participants. For example, all white participants in this study expressed the belief that soldiering is “a calling”. This reference to the “calling” of soldiers is often central in the stories about how they came to their current occupations. In contrast, all the African reported that they joined the military for socio-economic reasons. This highlights the racialised class inequalities that existed during the apartheid era and their impact thereafter. It is worth pointing out, though, that all of the African participants appreciate the military for the same reasons (representing the country and positive male identity) as their white colleagues. This points to the argument that the processes of racialisation and its intersection with masculine identity are fluid, and variations reflect changes in politics and social discourse.

The interviews were approximately an hour to an hour-and-a-half long, and explored the multiple ways in which these participants speak about their construction and performance of masculinity. One of the emerging themes related to the way in which they construct their bodies in relation their construction of their masculinity. The author anticipated that the interview format and use of vignettes would elicit rich and detailed data from the participants and not force the interviews in a preconceived direction.

¹ African refers to the black South Africans, Whites to both English- and Afrikaans-speaking South African whites. Coloured is a South African term for mixed race.

As the main interviewer in the study, I was concerned that being a female might lead participants to perceive of me as a feminist who might be judgmental of them as men. Although there is an assumption that people of the same gender are able to connect better in an interview situation, Scully (1990) found the opposite to be true in her study when, compared to her male colleague, she appeared to connect better with the male participants and obtained greater levels of disclosure. Similarly, I found that I was able to communicate well with the male participants. This might be due to my experience of being a psychologist in the military, and having to deal mostly with men in my day-to-day work in the institution.

To counteract any barriers based on gender, an experienced male interviewer was co-opted to conduct three interviews. This served to ascertain whether gender and other aspects of social identity (for example, age, race and language) impacted in any way on the interview process or created discomfort for the male participants (Phoenix, 1994; Shefer et al, 2005). Further, this helped ensure a different data set, outside of my influence. The male interviewer was selected based on his excellent interpersonal skills, open-mindedness, and expertise on the subject of gender and sexuality. His training as a clinical psychologist and his research experience in emotional and sexual matters proved valuable and effective. The content of his interviews did not appear to be compromised by the fact that he was a male interviewer interviewing male subjects; nor did it differ significantly from the content of the interviews that I had conducted.

Interviews were analysed using Edley and Wetherell's (1997) interpretative discourse analysis. Discourses of bodies or physiques in constructions of masculinity among this group of South African soldiers, and how these intersect with their sexuality in relation to the dominant discourses of masculinity were identified. In the following section, direct transcriptions from the interviews are presented to illustrate the discursive themes that emerged. Pseudonyms are used to identify participants.

MASCULINITY AND THE BODY.

The centrality of the body to masculinity emerged strongly in participants' discussions in the interviews (Connell, 2000). As Connell argues, institutions and discourses have attached social meanings to bodies. In the military, particular emphasis is placed on physical fitness and strength in achieving masculinity and successful military status (Klein, 1999). Some illustrative examples below highlight the importance of physicality in the home environment that articulate with patriarchal discourses related to protecting women:

John: "Be physically well built I would say. Um, in terms of relationships for me to be able to make my girlfriend or my lady quite happy. That in a relationship there must be protection ... so in the end I must give her everything that she can have. Then I feel like a real a man in my relationship".

Sam: "I want to be the father figure in the house... I must be able to give my family anything. I must be physically strong and work so as to protect my family".

John's excerpt below further shows how even if the body does not fit the ideal, being in the military can alter one's construct of self as "not male enough". His excerpt further underlines the centrality of a particular ideal body image in constructions of masculinity.

Despite the information that he “looks like a teddy bear”, and therefore does not achieve the ideal masculine image at the bodily level to start with, joining the military acts to reconstruct this and prove his masculinity. Thus the identity of a military man interestingly serves to undermine the social construction of him as “not man enough” with respect to his body:

John: “If you've got your own occupation you'll be able to do whatever is required of you [...] I don't really, personally, again, I don't really care about what people think about me. My soft voice or physique about my stomach and my backside, but ja, I don't really care about what people think about me. You know because I've been characterised as a ... they used to call me a teddy bear that was when there was nothing (pointing to the beard) at that stage, that was when I joined the army. And I never felt like threatened”.

The excerpt above demonstrates that in spite of the social pressures to conform to an ideal body for men, which is also perpetuated in the military, being in the military can also destabilise such pressures to conform to the general ideal image as legitimacy of masculinity is assured by the status of the military man.

Rubin (1993) suggests that the biological body should be acknowledged as experienced through cultural meaning and goes beyond the mere physicality of the body to the way in which it is represented. Similarly, participants in this study, raise the significance of the adornment of the body, with emphasis on dressing and the role of the media in reinforcing bodily concerns for men:

*Simon: “You don't read Cosmo [**Cosmopolitan**] (laughing). I enjoy, I shave, put moisturiser on, I look after my body, ok. I put some weight down, I enjoy ... I don't want to be this, you know you get a guy who thinks he is a man because he's got a lot of chesty hair, he has a moustache, he is healthy. I want to look good. I want to be a man but I want to dress well. I wanna look good. I want to make an impression, so I want to cut my nails, I want to clean my nails ...”.*

Interestingly, the excerpt from Simon speaks of men's bodily concerns shifting towards those traditionally constructed as more feminine – that of wearing nice clothes and using moisturisers etc. This points not only to increased advertising of such products for men, but also to the way male discourses are changing under consumer pressure. The excerpt is about the new forms of masculinity and the body which is impacted on by consumerism. It throws up concerns about appropriately “doing” masculinity but also highlights the emphasis on male neatness and bodily presentability in achieving military status.

On the other hand, the following excerpt is about the important link between the body and attracting women, another key component of hegemonic masculinity:

*Gerhard: “If you really are a true man, then every true man has got blood in him and that blood is causing him to look at the other, the other gender also so obviously you want to sometimes impress some of the ladies, and um you won't do that by dressing like a clown or a idiot or whatever. [] I think um just to dress neatly, clean, try and read **Men's Health** more often and see what the the dressing tips, how to make a tie, how to wear which shoes with which clothes and or which pants and belt and all that type of things. Putting a bit of aftershave on maybe now and then when you go out, and put*

your your Axe or your Ego [deodorant] I think that, that is dressing, dressing from a man's point of view".

The excerpt from Gerhard emphasises cleanliness and "looking after himself" primarily in relation to attracting women. Here masculinity and the centrality of the body as representative of successful masculinity are constructed in relation to women's sexuality and their responses to men. This ties in with McFadden's (1992) argument that in all societies and cultures, dressing and physical appearance are key to the constructions of sexuality. In this view physical appearance is culturally constructed and being sexual is related to the clothes that individuals wear and how they appear to others.

Furthermore, the excerpts show that some participants join the military for the status afforded the soldier which is symbolised by physical representation, primarily the clothing (uniform) which also powerfully impacts on the constructions of body image (Craik, 2005). The emphasis in the following excerpts is the way in which the uniform becomes an extension of the body:

Johan: "I like the uniform, I just, I just, I like the image of being a soldier".

Gerhard: "If I'm at Stellenbosch and I'm in uniform and I walk in there between the girls, then I'm feeling two feet taller. Really, I think it's the, it's the feeling of pride [...] It's a nice feeling to be in uniform, I think even nicer if you're walking between civilians on the street and people are looking at you".

It is interesting to note that Gerhard feels good when walking amongst the girls. This suggests that a body in a "nice" uniform exerts a comforting effect and creates confidence when among women. The uniform further confers a sense of masculinity, and facilitates a sense of masculinity that is viewed as superior to that of civilian men. Gerhard further mentioned that his friend also feels like "showing off" when he is in Stellenbosch:

Gerhard: "He would walk up straight like this (demonstrating with shoulders up)".

The importance of the uniform in conferring status in the military and in achieving masculinity suggests that the social structure of the military creates gender patterns which not only give male soldiers a sense of masculinity through the danger associated with their profession, but also a sense of strength through observable symbols, primarily that of the uniform. Similarly Craik (2005) argues that military uniforms convey power relations, status, authority and roles, and serve to shape the way individuals construct identities. As Connell (2000) also puts it, bodily practices ranging across dress, sport and sexuality locate and modify bodies and subjectivities in society. Therefore, the desired strong physique and the symbolic implications of the uniform bring into focus the centrality of bodies in the military in forming a particular type of masculine identity.

Returning to the participant Simon who perceives cleanliness as a symbol of manliness (Barrett, 1996), it is important to mention that he also spoke of *dirtiness* as key to male performance in certain military environments. Therefore dirtiness in a different context can also signify manhood:

Simon: "It depends [on] a situation. Once we go to Lehotla (South African Army Combat Training Unit), I don't want to be clean. I will be dirty because we are at Lehotla".

A body in dirty clothes is said to be one of the key principles of military training, demonstrating the hard work that is expected from "real men" (Service Sound and Vision Corporation, 1995, cited in Woodward, 2000).

The body intersecting with ethnic rites of passage.

Factors relevant to constructions of masculinity within different cultural groups can play a significant role in the interpretation of masculinity. For example, an initiation ritual performed on the body is also about proving bodily strength and the body is also physically impacted on as a sign of this transition, as in the case of circumcision and/or other physical challenges associated with certain traditional rites of passage. In studying the construction of masculinity among isiXhosa-speaking men, a self-conscious masculinity which gives circumcised men a voice of authority and decision-making rights has been reported (Gqola & Goniwe, 2005; Gqola, 2007).

Similarly in the current study, Mtobeli, who is circumcised, confirms that the initiation ritual symbolises manhood or masculinity, but maintains that he does not feel more of a man in the military because of initiation and that traditional practices may not translate seamlessly into similar hierarchal practices in the military:

Mtobeli: "Because I'm in the military I will compromise. It's like now here we have boys who call us by name and you don't ... you don't have a choice because at home the boys ... boys don't call me by name [] but in the military they call you by name. Then I will accept it because I'm in the military".

On the other hand, a coloured participant, Jeff did raise the issue, highlighting how such discourses are prevalent in the military. Jeff was wary of the implication that circumcision conferred manhood, while not being circumcised held men in perpetual limbo. He questions the initiation as necessarily illustrative of being a man.

Jeff: "Somebody does not automatically become a man just because he spent three or four months in the bush in a little camp".

Jeff further argues that circumcising immature boys puts a lot of pressure on them to prove their masculinity. He argues that this becomes problematic for them, for other ethnic groups, and for military culture. For him, men who are circumcised create animosity in the military as they undermine the rank structure. He quoted the example that if a group from a certain department is given a task which requires one person to lead the group, a person who is circumcised would be selected, or there might be conflict:

Jeff: "[A circumcised man] would try to force, even though he wasn't appointed by a senior official as being the leader. He wanted to enforce his authority because he was, he was a man. And there was many times that I've heard where a black guy would tell a white guy and a coloured guy, 'I'm a man, you're still a boy. You haven't proven

yourself yet'. And then the question is 'How can you say that?' And then he would say: 'I've been to initiation, what have you been?'"

Clearly the notion of subordination is as important to masculinity as the notion of hegemony. Statements by these participants show that a complex understanding of masculinity should take account of systems of race, ethnicity and class. As other theorists have noted, cultural processes, political needs and consolidation of power (both in the military culture and other cultures) enable, deny, impose and constrain expressions of masculinity and create power imbalances that necessitate dichotomies of who is good or bad, weak or violent (Connell, 1995; Dowsett, 2003; Morrell, 1998). To add complexity, it is evident that there may also be a clash between military discourse and the discourse of circumcision, as both discourses compete in defining hegemonic masculinity. What is central in both definitions is the body. A caution though is that other than the isiXhosa-speaking men, there are other African groups and Jews who practice male circumcision and participants did not make reference to them. Therefore, before more can be said, further research needs to be done in order to bring these discourses to the surface and unpack the extent to which they impact on male identities.

Militarisation of the body: Weapons as extensions of self.

The weapons used in the military are similarly viewed as extensions of the military body or like the uniform, as an accessory that adds bodily value. For some participants having a weapon on their body represent both a real and symbolic idealisation of aggression and as such functions as an extension of the militarised body. Military weapons and their implicit threat of aggression arguably constitute the ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Cock, 2001). A study conducted by Heineken and Khanyile (1996) found that weaponry was indeed a motivating factor for joining the military. Similarly, most participants in the present study expressed satisfaction and even pleasure in carrying a rifle, concurring that it provides a sense of manhood. A few excerpts demonstrate this:

John: "At first, when we started with our training, it felt good, okay. Yoh! I used to go home after my first weapons training and so, and I used to brag with this weapon, so yes, to a certain degree it make you feel better or special then you see [...] It definitely give a boost to manhood".

Military training in the sense of reinforcing masculinity has clearly worked for this participant. Similarly, carrying a rifle brings a sense of masculine achievement and is experienced as a powerful visceral experience for most participants:

Tshepo: "You just want to drill, drill, you feel like ja [yes] ja [yes] I am in the army. [] You think that this thing is gonna explode [...] On the other hand there is that excitement".

Gerhard: "The first time you do it, you feel like yoh! This is the big world. Once again every now and then when you handle a weapon again after a long time, once again you get that shaky feeling. You get that adrenalin rush".

Gerhard elaborates: *"It's just like in a relationship also, at first, everything is new to you, you can't wait just to hold the girl's hand and to kiss her at night and whatever, but then*

after a while you get use to it and then it's not funny anymore, and ag wat. It's just another thing, there's nothing special".

Interestingly, Gerhard likens the experience of carrying a rifle with intimate relationships. In a quintessentially patriarchal metaphor, women are conflated with military weapons, both bringing a similar frisson of excitement and "otherness" (especially when the relationship with the weapon/woman is new). It should be noted that Gerhard is a participant who is not sexually active because of his religious beliefs. Carrying a rifle and sexual intimacy are for him clearly related and are associated with pleasure and power. This again points to the intersection between masculinity, sexuality and sexual practices, and highlights the insidious way in which the military is sexualised (and imbued with the same forms of gender power relations) as well as sexuality militarised (with woman constructed as objects, like rifles, to be owned with pride, and which also bring a sense of power) (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007).

Tulani sees the issue of weapons as very much part of his authority and status, clearly illustrating his power to others even if not displayed too obviously:

Tulani: "I had my own rifle but now when I'm in the car, then I will put it there, and the troops will see (as if he wanted to cough). When we are patrolling then I will have my weapon but most of the time my weapon slings, I like to sling it".

In a way similar to Swart's (1998) description, participants in this study benchmarked their deployment preparedness with guns, and this relates to the conceptions of a macho body and the willingness to lead in risky situations.

The findings also highlight how particular categories of the military which depend on more physical strength are viewed as conferring greater military status as well as greater masculinity. Thus, certain occupations in the military which involve greater physicality and endurance are more facilitative of masculinity as in this quote in which being a "parachute man" is seen as reflecting greater physical strength and therefore higher status both as man and soldier:

Simon: "Like I wanted to be a parachute man, now you get to the Army and you think Hey! I can run force operations. Hey! I'm stronger than the rest. You go to the parachute training. You look around and you think, hey! I am better than you. It does definitely work on you".

Simon adds: *"I am full of injuries. I have been doing it rough now for 14 years. My ankles were broken, this ankle had operations, this one was shot, my wrists are sore, all my fingers have been broken, my knees are going, neck is going to break or busy cracking. [...] So because of work my body is old. I feel I'm 60 years old but that does not stop me from challenging myself even sexually".*

Despite all his injuries which prove the risks involved in his work, Simon challenges himself sexually. This attests to the perception that a strong well-formed body not only boosts the sense of masculinity, but is also linked to sexual prowess - having achieved physically viewed as representing sexual ability. Also evident in this quote is the way in which material scars of physical achievement, such as the injuries on his body, are a

source of pride, as they reflect his physical achievements and therefore, his status as successful military man.

Male soldiers and civilian male relationships.

There was a strong perception from some participants that civilian men are ignorant and somehow less knowledgeable about what is happening around the world, implying that civilian men cannot fully understand the world's issues. The soldiers' direct involvement with security issues makes them feel as if they have access to direct modes of male power and privilege that limit civilian men's bodily and intellectual ability to prove their masculinity, for instance by going to war. A number of reasons for the poor relationship between soldiers and civilians are evident in the following excerpts, which also set up the male soldier body in a privileged binary position to the male civilian body:

Tulani: "There are lot of differences, for example ... a soldier is actually trained not to fear, I'm ... I may say now some of the soldiers they fear nothing ... It is actually their motto that ... they are actually different than civilians".

John: "I've got this one friend now that is in the police force so he's actually become competition (laughs) [Interviewer: What is the competition all about?] He must just know that I'm his boss, stronger than him. [...] Currently he actually is in a more, in a more challenging environment than me because he's working with criminals, he must go out to, so he's actually doing more challenging work".

The discourse of competition between civilian men and soldiers is articulated as a major facet of the construction of masculinity among soldiers and played out through comparisons of physical strength and prowess. Soldiers' working conditions are risky (Heinecken, 2000), hence there is a construction that only tough bodies can survive those risky conditions. The emergence of this idea of masculinity hinges on physical training (Craik, 2005). As soldiers are risk-takers by profession, they see themselves as more masculine. This results in soldiers undermining male civilians to the point that mixing with them is negatively viewed and a sense of confidence and power is attained from comparison with them:

Simon: "When I'm out there, I'm a soldier but I talk civilian shit. [] You know we did a lot of things in the early 1990s that we were just not supposed to talk about. What you saw, you don't talk about it because its not ... (couldn't finish) []. You literally became a zombie to see so many dead bodies, so much blood. Once I got to civics I don't I don't want to talk Army. [] I want to escape Army for a while. I just want to talk about rugby, and ... and chase the ladies, get away from that. Recharge".

Participants dwell on the notion that being a man is tough and taxing, and being in the military is particularly demanding for men. On the other hand, civilians' lack of insight is annoying to soldiers as their knowledge, skills and capabilities are not recognised by civilians:

Tulani: "Civilian guys are actually ... are ignorant about the social behaviours of the soldiers. They tend to generalise the behaviours of the soldiers. Some of them don't understand that there are rank structures and how those structures work. If they see a

troop doing something wrong, they say soldiers, they don't know that soldiers are not the same".

Simon: "These days unfortunately the army has a stigma that, if you're in the army it means you're too shitty to get a job from outside".

Tshepo: "Especially when you have a firearm, they just take you like... Hayi, hayi [no., no], this guy can shoot you, which is not the case".

The lack of recognition from civilians appears to result in soldiers experiencing a paradoxical sort of powerlessness, a demasculisation which may fuel their "othering" and undermining of civilian men and their bodies and masculinity.

Interestingly, most participants reported having good relationships with civilian women. Does that mean women are more knowledgeable and respectful of military masculinity? It appears that women seem to assist soldiers in proving their masculinity through their sexual relationships. There is a perceived sexual rivalry between civilian men and male soldiers. The perceived sexual rivalry seems to be an overwhelming preoccupation among military men, emerging through a discourse of competition over the possession of women. Some participants feel that civilian women admire soldiers above civilian men. According to Sam:

Sam: "In the military we've got a, got a unique lifestyle, see. We do things unique. And some civilians don't like the way we do things. [Interviewer: Such as?] We pop out say hundred bucks we go to the bar we say so we sitting over there, here's the money for the night, you just supply us [...] Now, the ladies in the vicinity, usually likes the way we as soldiers are. Because in the discos we like to er make jokes. Just releasing (taking break from) the military. Then there usually becomes quarrelling because now the civilian guys, we break their hearts [Interviewer: Do you quarrel about women?] Yeah. Definitely. Some women are very funny, you see. Or most of them. Okay, I saw them, that they like the way that we as soldiers are doing things in a club. We'll get there, like, properly dressed and some civilian guys, how do I, does not come properly dress, so there's the first point. Number two is um, especially on pay day, soldiers, soldiers got little, how can I put it now, they don't care about money, see, especially on pay days. [...] And the women ... see it is nice in that group and so they will make some plans to get in the group, you see. And a civilian guy will see maybe this girl ...".

Again the bodily signifiers of being well dressed (in well built bodies because of physical training) and possessing and flaunting money are raised as a sign of masculinity. The competition is also evident in the following excerpt:

Gerhard: "In the military we always look at the civvies with suspicion. You know the civvies they are slapgat [], they are not so lekker ... The civilians again think, ja no the military guys think they are so clever and they are so masculine ... and they come with their uniform to take our girls away. Things like that".

Gerhard's statement supports Buchbinder (1994) who argues that discontinuities in male-male relationships are due to suspiciousness of each other, which may link to the theoretical understanding of how hegemonic masculinity takes on its identity in relation to other less valued masculinities and femininity. There were narratives across the

sample that showed it is easier for soldiers to impress and receive favours from younger women. Only one participant disagreed that women seem to particularly like soldiers. In this respect, it appears that the military male body is also a more desirable sexual body which links to the pressures on men to conform to hypersexual masculinity.

The sexual body.

The imperative to be a successful sexual body for these military men was very evident in the study. While men were constructed as sexual actors, acting from bodily desire, women on the contrary were clearly constructed as sexual objects. In line with Flood's (2000) findings that women's bodies are constructed as objects for men's pleasure, such a discourse also emerged in the study. Tulani for example argues that a woman's body may reach a stage where it does not serve any value to men. In Tulani's construction, once a woman's body does not provide him with optimal sensation all the time, she becomes useless:

Tulani: "When after a first round then we carry on to [a] second round and then I find now ... everything is too relaxed in such a way that I can't feel that I'm in or out, is where I'll decide [to leave the girl] ... the beautifulness of that girl diminishes ... I feel like having another girlfriend that is appetising".

In this discourse women's bodies are related to as an object of possession purely for the sake of men's satisfaction or pleasure. Also, the object or body is disposable after use. When its pleasure-giving value at a physical level is exhausted, it loses its "value". In this way, women (as body objects) are interchangeable for men's sexual pleasure and are in some way devalued if they do not gratify men's sexual desires.

Also evident in participants' constructions of their sexuality was the notion that they operate as men from a basis of physical desire. Linked with the construction of men's sexuality as very "other" to women, a discourse positioning men as different to women with respect to the body and its relationship with emotions also emerges. The assumption is that for men, emotions (for example, feelings of love) are disconnected from their bodies while for women emotions and bodily response are enmeshed. An essentialist notion of sex as bodily, linked to physicality alone, and unemotional for men was evident:

Daniel: "Sex for a man is very unemotional ... because you're thinking of physical things. You're thinking of how big her breasts are. You're thinking about [her] bums".

Jeff has a similar focus on the body:

Jeff: "She might have a great butt, she might have a great pair of breasts, but she's got it and you've noticed it ... compliment her. She's got it, why not, [...] if it attracts your eye it's like a good painting, it's there, I mean, and if that feeling of yours become way stronger than, ja, it does".

The training and everyday business of the military focuses strongly on physical strength and bodily appearance (Barrett, 1996; Presidential Commission, 1992). Bearing in mind the above excerpts, the way soldiers regard sex and women's bodies appears to be

part of their day-to-day normative thinking: that is, regarding the body as a weapon and a tool.

In a related vein, the participant, Bongi, articulates the oft-repeated idea that men are encouraged to separate sexual intercourse from emotion, and then fixate on the intercourse and its pleasures grounded in and through the bodies of women. That is where “the real action” is for men. That is where it begins and ends for them:

Bongi: “Men are not taking sex as something that [has] to be emotional. They’re just taking [sex] as a physical thing, and that’s it. There you have it. Period. End of debate”.

Because men are encouraged to construct male and female bodies and male and female sexualities as classic binary opposites, this separation between “emotion” (as in meaningful, sincere human connection) and sexual intercourse makes it easier for men to perpetrate sexual misuses or abuses. The discourse of separating love from sex is also found in other studies (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe & Thomson, 1991; Shefer, 1999). In this discourse on male and female, masculine and feminine sexualities and their expressions, women tend to offer men a “relationship” when what men really want is physical or bodily pleasure. And when this happens men “dive for cover”:

Bongi: “Many men tend to withdraw. Because, [they] see [they’re] not getting what [they] want. What they want is a physical thing, a woman’s body”.

These findings highlight the imperative for men, apparently more exaggerated in the military setting, to separate emotional connection from their sexual relationships. As has been shown in studies with civilian populations, being strong, being hypermasculine links to sexual prowess. Participants construct men’s bodies as sexually active and as always desiring women, as in the widely cited “male sexual drive discourse” (Hollway, 1989), yet only at a bodily physical level. The ways in which such a construction of male sexuality facilitates unsafe sexual practices is more than evident.

CONCLUSION.

This article has examined how a group of male soldiers construct and construe their bodies in relation to masculinity and their identity as men in the military. Their responses illuminate the diversity of discourses the participants draw on to explain what it is to be masculine and how this is achieved in and through their bodies. There is a complex relationship between the male body and masculinity, particularly as this relationship is played out within the military. In particular, male soldiers define their masculinities powerfully in opposition to others, specifically male civilians and women, and this is played out through bodily narratives. In sum, being in the military clearly emphasises the centrality of the body or physical representation evident also in normative performances of masculinity outside the military, yet apparently exaggerated in the military context. The study further highlights how body deficits and non-conformity to the masculine physical ideal also can be overcome by being a soldier. The military uniform and apparatus (in particular fire-arms) serve as evidence of being hypermasculine (and therefore hypersexual, which further confirms hegemonic masculinity). Military scars in or on the body are a further representation of successful masculinity and superiority to other men at a physical (and therefore, sexual) level. Another important finding in respect of the body and the military is that the more risky,

that is physically demanding and challenging the work that one is engaged with, the greater the perceived achievement of successful masculinity and military authority. Key concerns are with strength, toughness, independence and relations with women. In particular, opportunities to attract women are viewed as further proof of successful masculinity.

The powerful and multiple roles of the body in the construction of masculinity in the military highlights the importance of this knowledge in attempts to challenge unsafe sexual practices among military. While many of these findings mirror those emerging with civilian men, there are clearly some contextual components of the military that exaggerate a preoccupation and centring of the body and extensions of the military body (uniform and weapons) in the construction of dominant forms of masculinity in the military. Clearly many of these constructions facilitate practices of multiple and risky sexuality in many ways. In order to challenge risky sexual practices emerging out of hypermasculinity and hypersexuality, researchers need to further explore constructions of masculinity among military men and their complex enmeshment with the physical representation and performance of the body in order to inform interventions that speak to the particular context of this group of men.

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