RENEGOTIATING MASCULINITIES: PERSPECTIVES OF MALE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL (UKZN)

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, unless otherwise indicated in the text, is my own original work. This research has also not previously been submitted to any other institution for degree purposes.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation sought to delve into the deconstruction of the male gender and thus touch on the undercurrents accruing from changing masculine identities in South Africa. In retrospect, the empirical research conducted interrogated renegotiated male identities i.e. from authoritative, breadwinner, man-of-the-house etc. to scholar, nurturer, liberal etc. It looked at the transformation of masculinities within the gender discourse and asked if given the foregoing, whether men are indeed reconstructing their gendered identities in contemporary times. Analysis of perspectives concerning interpretations given to contemporary perceptions of masculinities was gleaned from a fraction of male students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Howard College campus. These students had undertaken an introductory gender studies module course at the campus. Face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants of this study.

Some findings from the study indicate that urbanisation and formal education play a role in mapping out new gendered identities among the young men interviewed. A cosmopolitan and urban environment may be contributing to novel ways that young men are enacting their masculinity. Several participants talked of emergent cliques and labelling that was a contributory factor to behaviour change as well as peer pressure. Nevertheless, for a number of them, cultural or traditional constructs still had some pull though some participants gave indications of interrogating which traditions to follow even though they still highly valued their cultures.

Recommendations gleaned from this study were therefore juxtaposed against the need to establish a more egalitarian environment in the hope of achieving gender equity. Due to the level of interrogation the participants showed in relation to their gendered identities, there is a need to pro-actively and continuously engage men in various gender equity programmes. As these young men's identities are in a constant state of flux, there was also a need to continuously interrogate what changes men are undergoing and what specifically propels them to behave in certain ways. Other than paying attention to how urbanisation and formal education impacts young men in a contemporary sense, it is also recommended that attention be paid to how older male role models impact on young men's identity formation.

Key words: Masculinities, Gender identities, Contemporary identities, Social constructionism

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the women in my nuclear and extended family (the Shikumo, Olembo and Wakhu families) upon whose shoulders families are reared, loved and encouraged and thus nations born.

A special dedication to my mother Mrs. Lydiah Anindo Shikumo whose love, care, prayers and material support have carried me all through. To my father Mr. Joseph Angulu Shikumo who gave us his three children equal opportunities to excel in our education and continues to encourage us to do more.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

1.1 Preamble

The question of feminism being misconstrued as a question of 'us' *vs.* 'them' or 'women' *vs.* 'men' illuminates the tendency to sideline men in the quest for gender equity. New schools of thought espoused by pro-men feminism and gender and development (as opposed to women in development) programmes for example, are however agitating for a call for evenly balanced gender inclusivity. An inclusive approach in this sense denotes an all-encompassing totality of human beings and not binary positions of man and woman. This then necessitates a deeper introspection of masculinities as a gendered category. It should however be clear from the on-set that the subject of masculinities on a general note, is not a knee-jerk reaction to male bashing but a theoretical interrogation of the inter-twined subjects: femininity and masculinity, in the hope of building lasting solutions to address gender imbalances. Gardiner (2002: 2) traces the antagonism between the two genders to the second wave feminism movements of the 1960's and 1970's especially in the West, whose theoretical frameworks acted as both judge and jury, charged men as having been the oppressors of women[1] and saw men's masculinities as "both an instrument and a sign of their power". Ghail and Haywood (2003: 102) are also of the opinion that "this hegemonic logic renders 'men and masculinity' absent to the 'gender majority', who assume that gender is something to do with women [only]". Bannon and Correia (2006: 245) indeed are of the opinion that "gender and development today thus remains very much a female bastion".

Nonetheless, there has been a slight shift in thought with masculinities gaining prominence within gender equity circles. A reason for this was the "desire to rework gender relations on a more equitable basis contingent upon the belief that the gender order oppresses and inhibits men as well as women" (Alsop *et al.*, 2002: 131). This dissertation therefore seeks to delve into the deconstruction of the male gender and thus touch on the undercurrents accruing from changing masculine identities in South Africa. In retrospect, it seeks to further interrogate renegotiated male identities i.e. from authoritative, breadwinner, man-of-the-house etc. to scholar, nurturer, liberal etc. The said identities will be examined from a cultural and social standpoint that views gender identities as emanating from "intersecting historical,

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[1] The main thesis of the feminist movement is traced in the critical examination of women's unequal status. While it is prudent that we acknowledge the salient role men have played in propagating gender imbalances, it is equally important to note that not all men are beneficiaries of patriarchy. Wiegman (2002: 35) aptly notes, "Because all men do not share equal masculine rights and privileges – because some men are, in fact, oppressed by women of the prevailing race and class – assumptions about power as uniformly based on sexual difference (men are oppressor, women as oppressed) have long been under pressure to give way".

cultural and social factors at a particular moment in a culture's life" (Buchbinder, 1994: 7). I will therefore find out and analyse perspectives concerning interpretations given to contemporary perceptions of masculinities from a fraction of male students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Howard Campus. Contemporary in this sense denotes the present time or a modern, current thought process. Buchbinder (1994: x) also notes a further omission of ethnic or racial difference in the construction of masculinities, which sets the stage for various interpretations and ideologies among different men concerning their identities, which I will also take into consideration. As such research participants included black, white and Indian men.

Identities are typically constructed from physical gender attributes attached to them. When the term gender is used in feminist analysis however, Cranny-Francis *et al.* (2003: 3) note that "it is traditionally defined in relation to sex [or as] the cultural or social construction of sex". In typical layman terms, 'sex' as a noun takes on a conventional usage that is associated with one's biological anatomy. We are thus able to judge a man from a woman and vice versa by the lack of or possession of either breasts (or a vagina) or a penis. These physical attributes are a defining feature of our biological difference but have become rather hazy given the recent proliferation of sex change operations and hormonal therapy to swipe one's sex. On the other hand, gender comprises widely held beliefs, expectations, customs and practices within a society that define 'masculine' and 'feminine' attendant attributes, behaviours, roles and responsibilities assigned to either man or woman. In this way, we are able to consider the historical and cross-cultural constructedness of masculinity and of gender itself (ibid). We can borrow and expand from a social role theory that expounds on processes by which gender is acquired to explain the closely linked sex role theory. Alsop *et al.* (2002: 66) posit that: "According to social role theory, men and women become masculine and feminine through social conditioning, and we learn the gender role that relates to our biological sex through our interaction with social structures, such as the family, schools, the media and so on".

Identity formation may invariably be gleaned from the close association to a member of the gender with similar attributes or from differences that are pointed out. According to Järviluoma *et al.* (2003: 17), "we are not born with an identity; rather, it gradually develops in relation to our experiences of social interaction and our cultural surroundings". It is a relational process. We then become localised into a social and gender reality. There is

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therefore a sense that identities are future-oriented implying that identity is a mater of becoming, rather than being.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to keep in mind that the process of creating and constructing masculine (as with feminine) identities has been a polarised debate due to the nature *vs.* nurture debate. As with essentialism (denoting nature) behaviours and mannerisms have been put down as innate or natural. These behaviours are thus seen as a product of nature or biological make-up and not nurture (Evans, 2003). These defined sex roles constitute a part of a shared reality that is digested as factual and natural despite its contrived foundation (Sobieraj, 1998: 16). The nurturing angle on the other hand, has a foothold in the social constructionist theory, which holds that gender roles are a product of society and culture. This will be explored more fully in Chapter 3 as it grounds the main theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Socio-cultural identities attach to males qualities of being pro-active, the head and thus decision-maker, and energetic while females are viewed as conservative and passive. The former has however resulted in the continued stereotyping of an erroneous masculinity type that strengthens culturally mediated roles and identities assigned to the male gender. Such hegemonic masculinity types stem from a gendered discourse that inscribes gender roles and identity as social categories that are pre-defined. These categories help us establish how men's (and women's) positions are located in various societies with men usually gaining superior status. Inevitably, a man's identity is constantly judged and assessed by other men and women and judged against prevailing dominant cultural dictates. Barker and Ricardo (2006: 160) give a synoptic description of a research done in Nigeria by the Social Science and Reproductive Health Research Network that concluded:

> Through both formal and informal means, such as jokes, social ridicule and insinuations, a man is informed of what society expects from him. A non-conformist is made aware of his difference. The society exerts strong pressure upon anyone that deviates from the socially accepted gender roles, letting a male know when he is failing "to be a man".

Despite the above observation, it is nevertheless imperative to note that masculinities are "fluid and rarely mutually exclusive" (ibid). This reflects the view that identities are never always constant but may be subject to prevailing changes. Morrell (2001: 7) reinforces this saying: "Masculinities are constantly being protected and defended, are constantly breaking down and being recreated". It thus makes it a worthwhile challenge to feminists to interrogate how and if men are acknowledging these changes positively in order to negotiate a more

inclusive approach to ending gender biases. Coles (2001: 7) also argues the case for the inclusion of the male role in gender discourses, saying that men may be better placed to understand and uncover the views that fellow men have about gender issues, and their own masculinities that are in flux. Kimmel (1987: 10) summarises it best saying: "Men's studies responds to the shifting social and intellectual contexts in the study of gender and attempts to treat masculinity not as the normative referent against which standards are assessed but as a problematic gender construct".

Another salient note is the assumption of masculinity as a singular form and not the more realistic picture of masculinities as a plural form. This in essence views masculinities as a varied, dynamic and changing construct and not only as a homogenous group nor as a hegemonic construct. I am thus seeking to interrogate a plurality of masculinity and hence masculinities. Masculinity has traditionally been seen as self-evident, natural, universal; above all as unitary and whole, not multiple or divided. It would be interesting to establish whether men (through the envisioned sample) are buying into the aforementioned constructs or renegotiating contemporary masculine identities that give room for the placing men at the centre in achieving gender parity.

The concept, masculinities is also as much a political term as well as a cultural or social grouping. By 'politics', I mean a public issue which gives rise to a conflict of sorts. Therefore, as a political statement I rightly ask if masculinities can become a site for resistance and subversion of culturally mediated norms (that are more often than not, oppressive). This is considering that it can simultaneously become a source of self-affirmation and assimilation for men and yet also a sign of potential risk and danger in terms of changing sexualities or identity crisis for example, in men.

Another point of departure is the assumption that masculinities, as with femininity is never neutral, innocent, a-social or a-political. It is always politicised. In other words, it comes to be defined in relation to a range of powerful forces like culture, law, media, economics, religion etc. To some extent, other than an interrogation of value systems engaged with during the Gender Studies module, this dissertation will also focus on cultural beliefs and thus examine how social constructionism mechanisms attach themselves to predetermined behavioural patterns. Sideris (2004: 89) posits that: "Beliefs and values about kinship and identity urge men and indeed women, to conform to dominant gender norms – even men who are sensitive to male oppression and the violation of women's integrity". Nevertheless, the element of

situating this study within the precincts of a university represents for me a cross between traditional and contemporary masculinities. This interface for me is critical because in analysing contemporary masculine identities, an assumption would be that access to higher education and particularly having attended a Gender Studies module would make these men more amenable to further interrogating their gendered identities.

It would however be highly improbable to talk about masculinities in South Africa without considering the country's tumultuous apartheid history that without doubt left an indelible mark in the construction of both masculine and feminine identities. This does not shift the focus of the study nor seek to reify any race but recognises the fact that as one of South Africa's important (yet painful) milestones, it does and did play an important role in assessing not only how culture but other structural systems play a role in identity formation at both an intrapersonal and interpersonal level. Morrell (2001: 10) concurs saying: "race and class are of major importance in determining how men understand their masculinity". Also, in light of the country's changing political, social and economic landscape, it would be interesting to find out whether male students at UKZN are more amenable to alternative and contemporary ways of thinking about themselves, other than a traditional male logic that privileges the male gender and/or certain race groups.

1.2 Tracing Masculinities in South Africa – Chequered History

In the South African context, the vestiges of the past apartheid regime live on in the ways men construct their identities, their place as dominant actors within the gender regime and their positioning in mainstream development programmes. This history traces the forces (both covert and overt) that act to influence and effect masculine identities. Morrell (2001: 7), while acknowledging the salient role of social constructionism, equally validates the role of history saying:

> While this gender identity is acquired in social contexts and circumstances, it is 'owned' by an individual. It bears the marks and characteristics of the history which formed it – frequently with salient childhood experiences imparting a particular set of prejudices and preferences, joys and terrors.

The narration provided herewith is a synoptic one and will be traced from the perspectives of how gendered identities come to be affected by historical landmarks. Representations of men in relation to women in South Africa often portray men as figures women struggle with, fear, resist or resent. Rarely if ever are men depicted as people - sons, lovers, husbands, fathers - with whom women might have shared interests and concerns, let alone love and

cherish. Nor is the range of subject positions actual men may occupy in different kinds of relationships with women, or indeed men, brought into the frame. Rather, 'men' emerge as potent, homogeneous categories that are invariably treated as problematic.

Tracing the history of South African masculinities is important as it enables a peek into how a combination of a colonial apartheid history, patriarchal cultural systems, a variety of religious and knowledge systems, formal education and urbanisation can and do create masculine identity. Further, other variables such as poverty, vulnerability and marginalisation can and do produce complex forms of male identity. Whilst I take cognizance of the fact that most of the undergraduate students currently in university (who form part of my survey's participants) may not have lived directly under the apartheid system, they still acknowledge that it has indeed shaped who they are today via the experiences of their fathers and mothers and other kinship relations, friends and role models.

Race relations as Buchbinder (1994) notes are integral to identity construction. The strength of apartheid was in its divisive Population Registration Act of 1950 (Vyshinsky, 1987: 25). Under this Act, people in the country were classified as belonging to one of the established racial groups – White (Europeans), Asian (mainly people from India), Coloured (mixed) and Bantu (African). Another landmark Act was the Group Areas Act enacted in 1950 also, which sought to control the settlement of racial groups in the country's territory. Black Africans were settled into artificially created administrative units consisting of geographically fragmented territories scattered all over the country known as Bantustans. In this set up, the white race was reified as being superior while the black race at the other end of the continuum was viewed as inferior. Asian and coloured people were accommodated in the centre of the hierarchy. While seen as "steadier" than Africans, Indian workers according to Kale (1999: 144) were regarded in less colourful though equally demeaning adjectives as: "less robust, timid, wily, dishonest, obsequious, litigious, insincere, roguish and cowardly". Further, during the resultant struggle against the apartheid system, black men (and women) in a bid to recapture their freedom took on identities of rebel, freedom fighter and warrior.

I will purposefully limit my discussion of the past with a focus on just the two points noted above. These two areas symbolise a part of what radical feminist bell hooks terms as the interlocking systems of domination – those of race and class – that when interfaced with gender relations, add up the whole matrix of gender inequality and identity construction. Apartheid (and the colonial projects in other parts of Africa) and the spatial separation thereof

acted to impact negatively or positively (depending on which side of the divide one was) on individual psyche, identity and economic base. Morrell (2001: 8) offers a synoptic analysis of the resultant features as:

> South Africa until recently was a man's country. Power was exercised publicly and politically by men. In families, both black and white, men made decisions, earned the money and held power. The law (both customary and modern) supported the presumption of male power an authority and discriminated against women. But the country's history also produced brittle masculinities – defensive and prone to violence. For white men, the uneven distribution of power gave them privileges, but also made them defensive about challenges (by women, blacks and/or other men) to that privilege. For black men, the harshness of life on the edge of poverty and the emasculation of political powerlessness gave their masculinity a dangerous edge.

Whilst the political sphere provided much upheaval, men were also constructing their identities in line with other attendant structural systems i.e. religion, the media and more importantly, culture and tradition. According to Morrell (ibid), "colonialism may have destroyed the material base of African economies, but it did not destroy the history which was woven into a myriad of gendered rituals which served to legitimate the sexual division of labour and male power". It is interesting to note that in an instant, traditional systems gave back unfettered power to some degree, to men and especially black men, from whom state authority had wrenched away from and diminished their power base. Collinson and Hearns (1994: 98) are of the thought that: "to name men and masculinity [within culture], to make those categories visible and to recognise their power, and to deconstruct them, to undermine, subvert and dismantle them" would act as a paradox that makes men explicit yet decentres them in the gender discourse.

Within cultural precincts, black men whose masculinities had been demoralised under apartheid found traditional, sexist and macho styles of masculinity under patriarchal legacies invested in culture and tradition. Patriarchy is of central concern to especially radical feminists who view it as the systematic domination of females by males (Giddens, 2001: 115). Walby (1994) views patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. For white men (mostly Afrikaans speaking) who made up the South African government during the apartheid regime, an "authoritarian, unforgiving and unapologetic" (Morrell, 2001: 17) masculinity was constructed. Furthermore, an ideal white hegemonic masculine identity prescribed financial independence, one be a practising Protestant, maturity (over 25 years old) and an irreproachable personality (ibid) as qualities for a white Afrikaner male.

In the same vein, black masculinity that was raised on a pedestal by African cultural belief took a tumble when interfaced against economic independence that spawned off ethnic labelling and a hierarchal ethnic identity as Morrell (ibid) notes. This system saw Africans in menial labouring positions, Indians and Coloureds in artisanal professions while Whites in supervisory and professional positions (ibid). In summation, Morrell proffers that "the only way to explain these [masculinities] is not by returning to biological formations of masculinity, but by referring constantly to the experience of colonialism, apartheid and racial capitalism".

It is of interest to note that whilst black South African men in particular were grappling with the dehumanising effects of their emasculation under apartheid, they paradoxically reclaimed that power (to some extent) within African cultural systems and traditions that tended to instil male domination over females. This was through the patriarchal authority of village chiefs, headmen and male household heads. Nevertheless, this was more of a rural African black masculinity that was enforced through "ethnic nationalism, mornachialism (amongst the Zulu)[2] and strict gender hierarchies through the rule of male elders" (ibid).

A fast forward into post-apartheid South Africa reveals dimensions of masculine identity and constructions that may not be totally different in terms of aggression. On a wider scale, Morrell (2001: 18) notes: "Violence is a unifying feature amongst South African men, black and white". In addition to this kind of physical violence, sexual violence meted out on both men and women by men (and in some cases women too), and the rising numbers of HIV/Aids among women that inscribes their subordinate and precarious position within the gender order is indeed worrying. In addition, Morrell (ibid) notes that township machismo[3] associated with gangs has been around for a long time amongst blacks and coloureds in the Western Cape. Bhana (2005: 206) notes that "the hegemonic masculinity drew on *tsotsi*[4] image in a discourse of masculinity, which was subversive of authority and anti-social".

The pointer to the *tsotsi* culture in no way legitimates the assumption and stereotype that all black South African men are prone to violence or are involved in gangs. While structural

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[2] The largest South African black African ethnic group who live mainly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.
[3] Machismo denotes a strong sense of masculine pride, or an exaggerated or exhilarating sense of power or strength.
[4] *Tsotsi* is an oppositional street masculinity alive especially in black urban townships. *Tsotsi* is usually associated with a flashily dressed black male street thug frequently a member of a gang and armed with a knife or weapon, Brandford, 1980 (cited in Bhana, 2005: 206).

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inequality and poverty remain as factual, there is a growing number of black professional and a working class stratum that has emerged in South Africa. It is nevertheless important to make and take note of the differentiation of a white masculinity type that is dissimilar from that of black or Indian men. For Morrell (ibid) this difference "coheres a history of white supremacy and thus frequently features as ruling class (or hegemonic) masculinity".

As noted earlier, a problematic and violence-prone masculinity has emerged in South Africa. An online article by Caroline Dempster in 2006 puts the precarious status of South African men in perspective and underscores the urgent need for change. In her article, she reports on a survey of 2,000 men conducted by the 'Men as Partners' project of the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa. This report found that 22 per cent of the men interviewed approved of hitting a partner, and more than half believed that rapes were caused by women dressing or walking in a provocative manner. In 2004, a nationwide study of adolescents based on interviews with nearly 270,000 South African boys and girls aged from 10 to 19, found that 58 per cent of all respondents felt that "sexual violence does not include forcing sex with someone you know". In addition, Smith (2006) reports that according to the Law Reform Commission estimates, though there are 1.7 million rapes a year in South Africa; on average only 54,000 rape survivors lay charges each year.

Dempster (2006) relays concern raised by Dr. Rachel Jewkes who is the head of the South African Medical Research Council's Gender and Health Unit who has been studying sexual violence for the past decade. She says rape is "more common in countries with a more pronounced gender hierarchy and in a culture where violence is used to exert dominance". Indeed, the history of masculinities in South Africa interspersed with racial segregation during the apartheid system, marginalisation, poverty, violence and the forced migration that uprooted men from families and communities for blacks is very poignant. These social ills transformed male identity into something typified by aggressiveness, risk-taking, sexual prowess and dominance over women. Given the country's past history, Dempster (2006) notes:

> Most sociologists agree that rapid political and social change in post-apartheid South Africa has eroded the traditionally privileged position that men used to enjoy. A combination of poverty, unemployment and the empowerment of women has left men of all races feeling marginalised and anxious to re-assert what they believe is their rightful role in society.

Nevertheless, for all the doom predicted above, there has been a new buzz surrounding masculinities in South Africa that takes the past and current profile into account. A 2003 study on fatherhood initiated by South Africa's Child, Youth and Family Development Programme of the Human Science Research Council, whilst having leanings towards the nurturing and paternal care offered by men to their children, also inadvertently addressed masculinities on the periphery. The study argued for a re-positioning and interrogation of the centrality of fatherhood in the lives of men, the central theme being: "In becoming *baba*[5], South African men can also go a long way towards healing themselves" (Morrell and Ritcher, 2006: vi). The study focussed on absentee fathers given the rising numbers of female headed households in the country. It called for the recapturing of a somewhat lost identity of an involved fatherhood, one of the many caps that men wear.

1.3 Problem Statement

This research delved into the deconstruction of the male gender and therefore undercurrents accruing from changing masculine identities in South Africa. It looked at the transformation of masculinities within the gender discourse and asked if given the foregoing, whether men are indeed reconstructing their gendered identities in contemporary times.

1.4 Objectives of the research

It is without doubt that men in different cultures perceive and experience manhood differently. Cornwall (1997: 11) suggests that the problematic nature of gendered developmental research has tended to marginalise issues of men and masculinities saying: "men are often excluded from being part of the processes of changing and confronting gender inequality". This study will therefore seek to:

- Investigate if (and how) masculine identities are upheld by longstanding discourses of cultural, traditional, and social constructs or dispelled by changing belief systems;
- Explore and evaluate contemporary gendered representations of masculine identity that UKZN male students draw upon;
- Interrogate the processes of change, if any, that the male students view as motivation for changing masculinities;
- Scrutinise what meanings, if any, are given to various masculine constructs by UKZN male students.

1.5 Significance of the study

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[5] The term *'baba'* is a polite form of address to an older African man (Morrell and Ritcher, 2006: v).

Over the years, there has been an increased recognition to the cost wrought on men by certain traditional aspects of masculinity. A World Health Organisation (WHO) study conducted in 2000 in Uganda and titled: *'What About Boys?'* found out that men's general lack of involvement in their children's lives, higher suicide rates and increased violence in men than women, and alcohol and substance abuse were acute pointers to that cost. It is in this regard that there have been calls to devise ways to working with men to best understand the male psyche, thus creating room for the inclusion of men in gender programmes. Closer home, in light of South Africa's changing political and economic climate, Morrell (2001: 3) notes that "another change in gender relations that has received less attention has been the change in masculinity" with men not being as privileged in their gender contrary to popular belief.

This research is born out of results yielded from a short exploratory study carried out between March and June 2006 for my coursework that sought to probe perceptions of gender studies from male students at UKZN. The study realised that though a small percentage of the male students had taken cognisance of the fact that women were indeed still by and large an oppressed gender, they also noted that issues arising within masculinities itself had forced some of them to re-consider their position as a privileged gender. Some of these issues included a censured homosexual identity, having educated girlfriends, current subscription to contemporary living as opposed to cultural belief systems etc. These issues mentioned made me realise that these young men were to some extent questioning popular and traditional versions of masculine identity. Furthermore, my interaction with students undertaking an Undergraduate module in the Gender Studies department at UKZN[6] also prompted my deep introspection of masculinities. This is because of the different ways in which the male students performed and interrogated their own masculine identity throughout the module, based on the above indicators.

I therefore felt that it was important to further pursue the subject of masculinities in order to explore whether male students at UKZN through my proposed sampled group are reconstructing their gendered identities in contemporary times and thus capture masculine diversity. As a pointer to the preceding mood, men are largely missing from institutional efforts to address arising inequalities. Morrell (2001: 9) however forces us to recognise a paradigm shift saying: "while the majority of men mostly perpetuate and reproduce dominant

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[6] This particular Undergraduate module titled 'Ways of Talking and Thinking about Gender: Introduction to Gender Studies', at which I was a Tutor, was undertaken between August - November 2006.

gender relations and forms of masculinity, there are some men who either consciously or unconsciously oppose the hegemonic prescriptions of 'exemplary' masculinity".

Indeed as gender identities are fluid, this study also aims at understanding if and how young men at UKZN are reconstructing their sense of agency in light of culturally proscribed roles and varying contemporary roles. In recognition of contemporary masculinities that are in flux, it is hoped that this study will contribute to a growing body of knowledge which decries the absenteeism of men from gender and development discourses.

New research and perspectives call for a more careful and thorough understanding of how men are being socialised and how we can engage them to promote greater gender equity for all sexes. Connell (2000: 35) argues that the initial feminist movement's conceptualisation of patriarchy assumed immense advantages for men across the board. Such an assumption and loop-sided system inscribed women's oppression and discrimination in men and an erroneous masculinity as the enemy. The result as Connell sees it has been the pursuit of a feminist agenda that addresses the disadvantages of women exclusively. He as such argues that: "we need to explore the places men occupy in the system of production and exchange" (ibid).

The focus on men and masculinities emerges therefore from a gender perspective. I thus reviewed my research using a gender perspective from two approaches; gender equity and gender specificity. Gender equity refers to the relational aspects of gender and the concept of gender as a power structure that often affords or limits opportunities based on one's sex. This simply means working with men or involving men more in gender programmes. But a salient point of departure would call for the interrogation of these masculinities that are fluid and as such dependent upon cultural, political, historical and contemporary determinants.

The WHO (2000) study mentioned earlier notes that emerging research on adolescent and adult men has suggested that while men were often considered the default gender; they have not been adequately studied or understood. Thompson and Pleck, 1995 (cited in ibid) argue that much social science research assumes that men are genderless. The assumption that all men are privileged in their gender also stems from that same thought process. The practise and concept of masculinities needs to be interrogated (and hopefully reconstructed) in ways that fit new socio-economic realities that takes cognizance of men's implicit role(s) in rural-to-urban migration and the consequences for women (and children) left behind, women's advancement, rising cases of HIV/Aids amongst women and unemployment. A new way of

perceiving manhood would empower men to live their sexuality differently and to take active participation in seeking gender equality.

1.6 'Introduction to Gender Studies' Course Format

In as much as this dissertation seeks to interrogate masculine identities, as the research participants were students of the Introduction to Gender Studies module, there is reason to somewhat expound on the pedagogical objectives of the course and its contents. On the outset the course reader states the aims of the module as to: increase sensitivity to a broad range of issues at personal, interpersonal, institutional and community level by highlighting 'traditional' and 'modern' cultural assumptions about gender, and how they impact on both men and women. Students are thus encouraged to talk, think critically whilst constructively analysing various gender debates.

The module's teaching structure entails formal lectures, tutorials, various reading materials on topical issues, reaction papers and class debates. It is during the tutorials that students are able to critically respond to issues that challenged them during the lectures and also in their lives as their experiential lives are very much gendered. Discussions in the tutorials focus more so on the gendered reader's perception of a given reading. Because perceptions are varied and very relative, it is almost as if students produce their own gendered narratives. Some of the thematic issues touched on include questions about culture, language, class, history, politics, race, law, power, sexuality, disease, violence, identity, masculinity and femininity.

1.7 Structure of dissertation

Chapter 1 will give an introduction to the dissertation spelling out the rationale for the selected topic by giving a brief overview. It will go on to present the problem statement, hypothesis, and culminates in summing up the objectives of the conducted study. Finally it will chart out the structure of the dissertation as a whole.

Chapter 2 will begin by articulating gendered reactions and perceptions of masculinities as localised in the feminist discourse. It will also take into consideration constructs of masculinities and their concomitant identities as mediated by racial, cultural, and contemporary ideologies in South Africa. It will pay attention to opposing views on masculinities as held by (some) feminists that will form a debate as to the advantages and viability of the former in bringing gender parity while at the same time isolating

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heterogeneous masculinities as a stepping stone to charting out the course of bringing about the required change.

Chapter 3 will outline the theoretical framework from which the research will be grounded. This establishes the direction of enquiry the research will take and what models are to be utilised in the study.

Chapter 4 will document the methodologies to be employed, and justifies their usage. The process undertaken, ethical considerations and limitations encountered will be detailed.

Chapter 5 will offer data analysis and ensuing discussion in narrative form of the findings accruing.

Chapter 6 details the conclusions from the study presented jointly with the recommendations.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003) note with concern, and rightly so, the preoccupation amongst researchers studying men and masculinities, the need to justify and position themselves as being male feminists. While there is nothing inherently wrong with classifying oneself as a male feminist, the overarching concern should be "interrogating feminist methodological concerns [and] producing less partial representations of the social world and women's and men's cultural habitation of it" (ibid: 11). Thus, the impetus to situate masculinities within the feminist debate, for me, lies rooted in the need to explore gender relations located in hierarchal levels, positions of inequality and a skewed power base. Nevertheless, masculinities as with femininities is traced back to ensuing gender identities that both men and women play out interactively. Harris (1995: 9) notes that: "gender identity has been defined as an individual's own feelings of whether he or she is a woman or a man, a girl or a boy [and] in essence is the self attribution of gender". Gender *per se* is nonetheless not a problematic variable. Much of feminist critique lies with how human beings choose to 'do' or to enact their gendered roles and identities depending on which ideological beliefs as mediated by culture, religion, peer/age groups etc. that they buy into.

This chapter focuses on the vast and growing body of literature on masculinities. Most of this literature however examined men mostly as a dominating factor. Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003: 103) note that "until recently, masculinity as the signifier of dominance had become the examined norm". While I have explored in the preceding chapter (see section 1.2) arguments that validate such dominance crouched in violent, risk taking and authoritative forms of masculine identities, there are at the same time equally positive male identities. There are also groups of men struggling to find their niche in a defined format of what it is to be a man, seen for example among homosexual men struggling with hegemonic ideals of heterosexuality. My chosen focus therefore emerges from the viewpoint of masculine identity being very fluid and never constant. I will also explore men and masculinities from the context of a gendered field, taking cognisance of the sociohistorical approach of alienating men from the gender majority (ibid: 102).

Nonetheless, in sifting through this identity formation, we realise that women's subordination and men's superior position has been shrouded in patriarchy. Spender (1982: 5) equates it to a question of men always being in charge saying:

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> Men are in charge in our society, not only do they hold the most
> influential positions and own and control most of the resources, but their
> positions and resources enables them to … make pronouncements on
> what makes sense in society and what it is to be valued.

Feminist movements from as early as the 18th century with the likes of Mary Wollstonecraft and Emma Goldman among others, subsequently began challenging sex roles and gendered identities that defined men as superior and women as subordinate. Their point of reference was that "male identified roles were frequently seen to be more important and deserving of greater social rewards than female-identified roles" (Steans, 1998: 11). It was realised that the status accorded to both sexes was not equal. What had seemed to be natural in terms of men being more "aggressive, objective and logical [as opposed to women being] more passive, emotional and sensitive" (ibid) was queried. It was concluded that such illogical gender apportioning had been used to justify women's subordination over the years.

I choose to borrow one of the perspectives on masculinity, the normative perspective, to focus my arguments around identities being steeped in social constructionism. A normative perspective thus "conceptualises masculinity in terms of culturally constructed social roles and focuses on a person's attitudes towards, or level of endorsement of male roles" (Thompson and Pleck, 1995 (cited in Chu et al. 2005: 95). But more than just interrogating these identities, the critical point of departure for me, is to look at the ways in which these masculine norms and identities therefore, manifest themselves in these men's lives. How these norms influence their choices in terms of making a conscious decision to either adhere to, comply (blindly or otherwise) with or critically engage with what their choices mean for gender parity, because the latter becomes the overriding theme.

Pleck, Sonenstein and Ku, 1993 (cited in Chu et al. 2005: 95) speak of the 'masculinity ideology' which refers to "beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behaviour". Other than just prescribing the adopted norms, a masculinity ideology explores the reasons why specific norms have been chosen and others forfeited and the internalisation process of accepting these norms. As well as giving a feminist interpretation of how these identities are formulated, this chapter will also give a brief anthropological perspective of how structural institutions such as culture, play a role in consolidating and firming up these identities.

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Just how these identities come to be formed thus remains vital to understanding ensuing gender positions. Gendered roles and identities formed thereof have thus come to be understood as patterns of social relations. Connell (2002: 9) situates it further as a social constructionist phenomenon saying:

> Gender must be understood as a social structure. It is not an expression of biology, nor a fixed dichotomy in human life or character. It is a pattern in our social arrangements, and in the everyday activities or practice which those arrangements govern.

Gender skewed relations and biases that involve male superiority which have prompted comment and action from feminists, have been well documented over the years. In the recent past, the HIV/Aids pandemic, other than its catastrophic cost to human lives and economic viability, has laid open the harsh realities of increased infection rates among females, by their male partners and a subsequent interrogation of problematic masculinities. Rebombo (2006: 15) expounds on this unequal gender relation saying: "Many women are not in a position to either negotiate safer sex or make overall decisions about their reproductive health, which leaves women vulnerable to poverty, dependency on their male counterparts and sexual violence".

A recent study conducted by a UKZN post-gradate student, Miss Winifred Ogana titled: *'Sexual Misconceptions that Pre-dispose African Adolescent Girls to HIV Infection'* carried out in a secondary school in Umlazi Township, Durban, South Africa, revealed a variety of sexual misconceptions about male sexual (and by extension, masculine) identity that fuelled the spread of HIV infection among her female respondents. One such misconception voiced by a female respondent was of the view that: "… men run the risk of mental insanity unless they have sex and … that a man is less of a man if he does not engage in sex" (Ogana, 2006: 61). The central theme arising from the examples cited is a problematic hegemonic masculinity type that needs to be addressed from a feminist viewpoint. Barker and Ricardo (2006: 159) aptly note that: "two of the most pressing social issues in Sub-Saharan Africa – conflict and HIV/Aids - are directly related to how masculinities are socially constructed".

A feminist approach has therefore taken to questioning errant masculinity types. This is premised on the belief that "over the past three decades, scholars have focussed [more] attention on women, femininity and female sexuality [while] little attention has been paid to men, masculinity, and male sexuality as constructs and contingent historical fictions" (Robinson, 2002: 147). But a new feminist order as opined by Shaun de Waal (2006) in an

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article in the Mail and Guardian asks us to question more than just naturalised gender identities. His reasoning is that identities are not formed arbitrarily but stem from interactions with structures such as culture, society itself, education systems etc. His conviction holds that:

> Just as feminism asked us to question the 'natural' categories of male and female and to wonder how such categories articulated power relations in society, the new gender studies asks us to consider the ways in which society constructs and delineates gender categories across the bar – not just male/female but masculine/feminine (not the same thing), straight/gay and even normal/perverse.

The central theme surrounding social constructionism as a theoretical framework for identity formation will be further analysed in chapter three. I will turn my attention now to the politics of masculine identity and raising feminist concerns by problematising masculinities.

2.2 A feminist approach to masculinities

Over the recent past, masculinity, like femininity has gone under the microscope with deep introspection regarding the role of men in the struggle for gender equality and the possibilities for positive engagement. As discussed above, a problematic masculinity type seemed to emerge and dominate the scene and thus adding less credence to involving men as credible partners in any gender development programme. Lemon (1991) lists a number of factors that have contributed to the development of the contemporary and perceived 'crisis of masculinity', namely:

(i) the women's movement and the rise of feminism;

(ii) the gay liberation movement and the increasing visibility of homosexuality;

(iii) the communication revolution and the rise of popular culture; and

(iv) the declining emotional and physical health of men.

Lemon (1991) proposes that the traditional roles of men are now in question. Within this context, the so-called 'crisis' is nothing more than men realising that women have begun to make inroads into areas of hitherto, masculine control. Probably the most important factor which has caused the alleged 'crisis' is the belief that women are not only beginning to dominate certain sections of the labour market, but that they are moving into positions of real power in society, and are now questioning the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal power (Brittan, 1989). Moreover, due to the fact that masculinity is a relational construct, changes in women's roles and a growing number and covert acceptance of

homosexual relationships have necessitated a number of adaptations in hegemonic masculinity (Lemon, 1991)

In short, the (perceived) crisis of masculinity is really a shifting of the balance of power between the sexes. The so-called 'crisis of masculinity' represents a time of renegotiating assumptions, and a redistribution of power in human relations in response to these changes (ibid, 1991). In addition, pioneer work by sociologist and pro-feminist theorists, Michael Kimmel in the United States of America and Michael Kaufman in Canada in the mid-1970's and early 80's led to the recognition of masculinity as a "key social problem and a key component in the gender question" (Morrell, 2001: xiii).

At this point, it is prudent to define in what context I am situating masculinity as an identity structure. Bilton *et al.* (1996: 200) describe masculinity as "various socially constructed collections of assumptions, expectations and ways of behaving that serve as standards for forms of male behaviour". Again, a salient pointer is that it is the behaviours and expectations assigned by societal and/or cultural structures that are problematic and under scrutiny plus ensuing identities. Gender differentiated power bases among the sexes often divide these expectations. In connecting masculine identity with violence in Colombia, Alcaraz and Suârez (2006: 102) noted that: "in the case of masculinity, this incarnated notion of power is directly correlated with violence [as] many men consider their violent actions against women legitimate because they have culturally assimilated an essentialist idea of delicacy and feminine submission in opposition to masculine aggressiveness and superiority".

Viewed through a gender lens, masculinities and hence the construction of the male identity are formulations from which women's oppression and subordination are birthed. Out of this stems patriarchy which "traditionally means 'rule of the father' and is used to describe the type of household organisation in which the older man dominates the whole household" (ibid: 666). This definition is now more or less generally used to describe the dominance of men over women. Mies (1998: 38) states that "… women's oppression in the private sphere of the family or in 'reproduction' is assigned to patriarchy".

Masculinities however is not a constant. It is always fluid. As much as it can be described in one breathe as a discourse, it is also an experiential variable. This is because it is lived, performed or even acted out. Different cultures, religions, races etc. construct masculine identities very differently. It is for this reason that masculinities as a social category is never

neutral, innocent, a-social or a-political. It is always politicised. In other words, it comes to be defined in relation to a powerful range of forces. Bafana Khumalo, the former Deputy Chairperson of the South African Commission on Gender Equality aptly describes the multi-faceted nature of masculinities as:

> Like femininity, masculinity operates politically at different levels. At one level, it is a form of identity, a means of self-understanding that structures personal attitudes and behaviours. At another distinct but related level, masculinity can be seen as a form of ideology in that it presents a set of cultural ideals that define appropriate roles, values and expectations for and of men.

Brazen statements like 'a true man', a 'real man' etc. depict standardised yet ill-conceived ideals of what constitutes a typical or conventional thought of masculinity type-set(s). Connell (2005: 45) posits that "true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body". In this instance, a biological essentialist viewpoint on gender identity formulation takes root. An essentialist perspective according to Bilton *et al.* (1996: 201) holds that identity traits and behaviour are common to all men and women and as such have a universal unity or homogeneous nature. The weakness with such an approach is that the choice of the quality or essence assigned to denote what a man (or woman) is may be random and capricious, or arbitrarily given.

A feminist introspection of masculinity seeks to define the former as an intellectual and political project. A gender studies module at the post graduate level at UKZN proposes that "as feminism is [in itself] not a coherent, pre-determined, fixed and absolute field of enquiry, there may be areas of inquiry that move beyond feminism and gender"[7] and hence the need for a detailed exploration of theoretical issues related to masculinities. It is important to clarify this assertion, notwithstanding that this dissertation seeks to ultimately interrogate masculine identities. Feminist gender analysis plays an important role in examining the power relationship(s) amongst men, and between men and women, and their consequences. My choice of core participants as being undergraduate male students who had undertaken the gender studies module was spurred on by the need to investigate whether there was a new crop of emergent masculine identities more amenable to instituting gender parity and social change. There may be an assumption that choosing participants who have already undergone the gender studies module may be defeatist as they may already be aware of their gendered identities, pressures faced by men, and ensuing gender inequalities and imbalances due to

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[7] This reason is outlined in the course reader for the Gender, Feminism and the Construction of Knowledge: Gender, Politics and Theory module offered at UKZN's Howard College, Gender Studies department.

formal education systems. Buchbinder (1994: ix) however notes the importance of self-examination for men enrolling in such courses as "some [of them] may not be fully aware of the sorts of pressures faced each day by men from the dominant, patriarchal model of masculinity".

Connell (1995: 54) also acknowledges the need for further interrogation when he says that "bodies [and by extension, identities subsequently formed as they are mutually constitutive] are seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct". There are growing feminist notions that believe that neglecting masculinities as a social category may act to further alienate men and thus naturalise negative qualities that propagate women's subordination. Thomas (2002: 61) recognises this saying:

> For feminist theorists who recognise the importance of this fact [leaving masculinities unstudied], a 'gender studies' that focuses on masculinity need not necessarily entail the depoliticization or betrayal of feminism. Quite on the contrary, it can also designate the critical process by which (some) men learn from feminism in order to make subversive interventions into reproductions of normative masculinity itself.

Then again, the mainstay in masculinities struggles is localised in gendered definitions of power. At the crux of this is how power is apportioned to the sexes, the politics of who gives it out, and how it is defined in the first place. Foucault (1981: 93) notes that "power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with: it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society". Cranny-Francis *et al.* (2003: 66) echo this thought as viewed by feminists saying "men have all the power and they maintain it by a systematic [and strategic] repression of women". Because power through this gendered lens is localised in men and hence patriarchy, masculinities are thus privileged in the gender hierarchy as women's negotiating power is lessened. This is because "under a patriarchal regime, women are, by definition, excluded from positions of power and authority – except where that power and authority works to support individual men or the social system as a whole" (ibid: 15).

It would thus be very easy, but erroneous, to label and blanket all feminists as being anti-male, male bashers or even men haters. Oyewumi (2002:1) however suggests that "feminist concepts [and struggles] are rooted in the nuclear family which constitutes the very basis of feminist theory and represents the vehicle for the articulation of feminist values". This crucial pointer contends that it is institutions and processes which create gender identities that are at fault. "This is in spite of the widespread belief among feminists that their goal is to subvert

this male- dominant institution and the belief amongst feminism's detractors that feminism is anti-family [and anti-men]" (ibid). Nnaemeka, 1998 (cited in Muthuki, 2004: 19) however qualifies that feminists and particularly, African feminists "consider the inclusion of men in their agendas because they recognise that just as them, men also face similar forms of social oppression".

2.3 The social construction of manhood in South Africa

As alluded to earlier (in section 1.2), the construction of masculine identity in South Africa has been shaped by a vortex of varied experiences ranging from a divisive apartheid regime, a race-relations amalgamation from 1994 following the end of apartheid, and closer from a gendered perspective, numerous pronouncements (legal or otherwise) in trying to achieve gender parity. Because 'doing' gender is a social practice, I intend to a large extent to investigate how social institutions contribute to formed gender identities. This is also strengthened by the fact that my research sample is situated in an academic institution; a public university that invariably presupposes a set of pre-conditioned gendered identities either in covert or overt ways.

But I can also not ignore that these same university students still come to the academic sphere with already established prejudices and behaviours occasioned by belonging to other social structures; family, clan/tribal/ethnic leanings, peer groups, religious institutions, or even formulated by media influences. Further, sexual preference, choice and performance as to homosexuality or heterosexuality now more than ever seem to also shape gender identity expectations. I will thus trace the social construction of manhood in South Africa within the precincts of some of the mentioned structures. This is further reinforced by Connell's (1995: 71) observation that "rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object ... we need to [also] focus on the processes and relationships which men and women conduct gendered lives".

Nevertheless, in studying masculinities, other than the fact that identities created thereof are fluid, Morrell and Ouzgane (2005: 7) beseech us to take cognisance of the fact that our understanding of African men (and South African men in this context) should start from a position of diversity. The key argument that Morrell and Ouzgane raise is that not all residents of Africa, and certainly in South Africa, are black as is usually depicted. Though the variations are different, varied and far reaching, Australian gender scholar Bob Connell nevertheless points out that "all men have access to the patriarchal dividend, the power that

being a man gives them to choose to exercise power over women. And this can be extended to the power to control the lives of other men as well" (ibid). The latter should act as a salient reminder to the numerous identities forged within masculinities as a gender category. This will be discussed in detail in the following sections given Bob Connell's categorisation of various masculinity types to include: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalised masculinities.

Rigid structured patterns within masculinities fall under the hegemonic dictum. For Connell (2000: 30), "what used to be called '*the male role*' (author's emphasis) is best understood as the culturally authoritative or hegemonic pattern of masculinity". In this instance, there is a correlation between a cultural ideal of what it is to be a 'bona fide' man and institutionalised power. Masculinities are of course a complex web of behaviour, attitudes and abilities which includes various assigned powers and privileges or limitations. Who or what assigns this complex web of attitudes and power becomes the question. Cultural and traditional practices (regardless of whether they are informed by ethnic or racial groupings) play a very major role in outlining gendered identities and roles performed thereof to both genders. Morrell (2001: 9) describes a hegemonic masculinity type as "a particular form of masculinity which is dominant in society, which exercises its power over other rival masculinities and which regulates male power over women and distributes this power differentially amongst men".

A hegemonic masculinity type plays a very crucial role in male identity because it is often associated with most men and is usually the basis upon which they are (arguably rightly or wrongly) judged. Bannon and Correia (2006: 245) attest to this saying "… a dominant form of masculinity across societies and cultures –hegemonic masculinity- is commonly the basis by which men are judged and assess themselves". It is instructive to also note that it is not only men themselves and various structural patterns and systems that confer men's identities. Women are also invariably complicit in shaping out masculine behaviours, discouraging or encouraging other actions and inadvertently shaping the (negative or positive) ways in which men exercise power and domination over women and other men. Barker and Ricardo, 2005 (cited in Bannon and Correia, 2006: 248) attest to this saying: "As mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, girlfriends, sexual partners or teachers, women come in contact with boys and men and directly and indirectly pass on messages on gender norms and expectations".

In an African context moreover, cultural (in addition to social) constructs were used to define the place of men and women. Borrowing from Mazrui (1986: 239) culture, as a "system of interrelated values [is] active enough to influence and condition perception, judgement, communication and behaviour in a given society". Meena (1992: 7) reiterates that: "Most of the existing literature locates the oppression of women and their subordinate position [and the esteemed place of men] in culture and division of labour…" while Ngcongo (1993: 6) notes that "the differentiated socialisation of girls and boys in African families' limits equality of opportunity for girls, even when they become women". The colonial projects and subsequent decolonisation process was viewed as simply "the placing of a certain 'species of men' by another 'species of men" Fanon, 1975 (cited in Meena, 1992: 9). The latter was simply a case of musical chairs that saw the transference of power from a white man to a black man. Needles to say, the 'new ruler's' immediate preoccupation was to reinvent the African 'masculinity' which saw the "depiction of an ideal woman as being submissive, married, rural-based, faithful and loyal to spouse…" (ibid). It is worth noting therefore that gendered identities are not all about nurturing but are inclusive of cultural constructs, race, class etc. which to a large extent direct the prescription of emotion and behaviours.

For some men, practising culturally sanctioned forms of masculine identities may not be just a ritualistic performance. This is because some of these acts act as a measure of self-worth thereby contributing to the internalised politics of the body. Nayak and Kehily, 1996 (cited in Alsop *et al.* 2002: 145) concur that "the performance is as much for self as others … [and] these actions are not simply a momentary social performance for an external audience, but form a technique for styling masculine self-identity".

Nevertheless, these formations of hard linear masculinities have been detrimental and perhaps no other pandemic in human history such as HIV/Aids has proved how fickle and dangerous hegemonic forms of masculinity can be. Morrell and Ouzgane (2005: 13) note that the recognition and re-focussing on gender inequalities, violence and sexuality has made the construction of masculinities an important part of research and intervention agenda for the pandemic. This is in recognition of the fact that women especially in Sub-Saharan Africa bear the brunt of HIV/Aids more than men to the extent that former United Nations Secretary General Koffi Anan described HIV/Aids in Sub-Saharan as bearing a 'woman's face'.

A Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids (UNAids) report titled *'Sub-Saharan Africa'* that gives HIV statistics reveals dismal gender parities in infection rates. Among young people aged 15-to-24 years, an estimated 4.6 per cent of women and 1.7 per cent of men were living with HIV in 2005 in Sub-Saharan Africa. The 15-to-24 year age group gains prominence due to the fact that these are young teenagers and adults at a prime age and at various academic institutions, if at all they are in school. Another UNAids report titled *'Gender and Aids Almanac'* highlights a study of Zimbabwean boys and girls that found out that while boys were expected to initiate sexual encounters, girls were not. The gendered identities forged from the above erroneous perception signify a sexual aggressiveness characterised by a hegemonic masculine identity including "dominance, virility and risk taking" (UNAids, 2001: 24). A critical interrogation of masculinities necessitated a shift in HIV/Aids intervention measures, which had earlier compelled a unilateral focus on women more than men. Morrell and Ouzgane (2005) concur saying that such 'reconstruction' work needs to be informed by analysis of the ways in which men understand and enact their heterosexual desires.

A salient feature of masculine identities that are reliant upon hegemonic constructs is that they are mutually constitutive of cultural prescriptions. In addition to the latter, either ethnic or racial prescriptions can invariably perform the same role(s). Connell, 1993 (cited in Alsop *et al.* 2002: 140) reiterates this feeling saying: "Hegemony is a question of relations of cultural domination...". In this way, black, white or Indian men could as well construct their identities from dominant and prominent streaks in their different cultures. As much as the contents of these hegemonic identities are not static, key features identified by Alsop *et al.* (ibid) relate to "heterosexuality, economic autonomy, being able to provide for one's family, being rational, being successful, keeping one's emotions in check and above all not doing anything considered feminine". The variations may be used on a sliding scale across and between various different cultural or ethnic backgrounds but are more often than not consistent in terms of any anti-feminine tendencies.

Deevia Bhana's 2005 study of masculine identity formation in a school setting titled *'Violence and the Gendered Negotiation of Masculinity Among Young Black School Boys in South Africa'* attests to a mostly negative institutionalised identity formation that is steeped in harmful cultural dictates. Bhana's study conducted in a primary school situated in a black township area in Durban, South Africa noted that "by the time boys begin attending primary school in South Africa, they have already embarked on a life long process of acquiring and

constructing their masculine identities [which] reach back in time into the family and in turn, the social location of these families plays a major part in the early processes by which masculinities are formed". Bhana's study also acknowledges another cultural lifestyle that the school boys are engaged with; that of the *tsotsi* gang culture. I should however quantify that Bhana's study is in no way a blanket representation of all academic institutions in South Africa and especially in black township areas. Nevertheless, her study provides an illuminating insight into an emergent urban-based culture that young boys are buying into. Bhana notes that the hegemonic masculinity type that drew on a *totsi* image identity type was "subversive of authority and anti-social", but is still not monolithic as it is highly contested, fluid and unstable. Given the staying power of learnt identity at childhood, it is highly probable that this violence backing masculine identity type will stay on with the boys as they grow into teenage hood and eventually adult hood.

Another form of hegemonic masculinity can be located in Afrikaner males. Pisani (2001: 157) confirms the somewhat superior inclination that Afrikaner masculinities took saying: "Hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity was intricately bound up with social and political power in Afrikaner society and hence with Afrikaner nationalism". Given the malevolent nature of apartheid, it is a paradox of sorts that an Afrikaner masculinity type stemmed from a biblical perspective. Pisani (ibid) explains it thus:

> Hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity was essentially puritan in nature. It took an unyielding Protestant view based on 'pure' New Testament principles, and rigid austerity and strictness in conduct and morals.

Radical feminist bell hooks description of interlocking systems of domination: those of race, class and gender come to bear in the face of Afrikaner men during the apartheid regime. By virtue of been white, they were classified as a superior race than blacks, Indians or coloureds. This had an impact on the masculine identity exhibited by white men, which was usually of a dominant and privileged type.

Pisani notes that as much as "authoritarianism and militarism have been consistent features of conservative Afrikaner masculinity" (2001: 165), sports was also another avenue to exhibit and consolidate their identity. The pre-1994 mindset attached to physical prowess and moral strength ingrained in sporting was also used as an example of an ideal puritan masculinity for the youth. The inherent message conveyed was that "through dedication, self-application, discipline and hard work, one could succeed in life" (ibid). Rugby with its macho, vigorous, robust and hardy image was regarded as the ideal sport for Afrikaner males.

To date, the Springbok rugby national team (which consists of more white players) are regarded with pride, joy and somewhat covert racist notions of been "trained as 'perfect machines' built up to a 'superior race'" (ibid: 166). These sentiments are trying to be dismantled though in the wake of a post-apartheid South African regime that acknowledges inclusivity and integration.

In defining South African Indian masculine identity, there is a point at which labour relations in South Africa play out to groom a totally different masculinity type. This is in specific relation to the formulation of an Indian masculinity type that is steeped in colonial vestiges. Masculine identity in South Africa has erroneously been limited to a binary discourse of either black/white or indigenous/settler. Vaheed (2005: 239) notices this blatant omission of the histories of indentured Indian whose "inbetweeness as 'not white' and 'not black' and their strong connections with the cultures of the Indian subcontinent" created disparate identity types. Vaheed (ibid: 240) also takes cognisance of the masculine identity of these indentured Indian workers arising out of a constructed interaction with "colonial employers, the colonial state, fellow indentured workers, Indian traders and indigenous Africans". In addition to the mentioned variables, "Indian masculinities which had traditionally come from a strict caste system had to either dismantle these or co-habit side by side and fashion out new categories" (ibid). Connell's assertion that the history of masculinity is not linear in the face of colonial projects aptly explains its transformation as a complex structure of gender relations in which dominant, subordinated and "marginalised masculinities are in constant interaction, changing the conditions for each others existence and transforming themselves as they do" (1995: 198).

Whilst we have noted power relations in a gendered context arising from categories of race and class, another salient category of note that informs masculine identity in South Africa is that which defines one's sexuality. Contestations between the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality vis-à-vis a normative heterosexual referent are critical in understanding masculine identity. This has strong ties to cultural constructs of what it is/was to be defined as a 'real man'. This idea underscores popular notions of honoured and accepted masculine identity forms i.e. macho, virile and heterosexual against dishonoured hierarchies like homosexuality. Connell (1995) categorises such a masculinity type as been subordinate.

Sexual identity on a whole has and is playing a critical role in shaping contemporary masculine identity in South Africa, especially given the precarious position of homosexuality in Africa as a whole. Nevertheless, despite the many battles to assert themselves in society, homosexual men still find themselves at loggerheads with the established gender order. Amongst all the races in South Africa, if colour and race were dividing factors, an attached negativity to homosexuality was a unifying factor. The latter was often associated with deviance and a rather unflattering distinction as the "other". Considering the Afrikaner puritan outlook, homosexuality was considered to be "sinful, unnatural and abnormal [and thus] suppressed as an alternative expression of masculinity through isolation and a conspiracy of silence" (Pisani, 2001: 169). A hetero-type sexuality in men is considered as been an essentialist characteristic but one that is also given cultural legitimacy. As such, Buchbinder (1994: 62) points out that: "since dominant notions of masculinity assume heterosexuality to be the norm in men, homosexuality may be interpreted as a failure of masculinity".

Sexuality and heterosexuality in men denote a visible virility which signifies reproduction in some instances as physical proof of one's manhood or maleness. The anti-thesis of this maleness is bound up in the opposite "other" in this case, femininity. Alsop *et al.* (2002: 147) reiterate this assumption saying: "If you are not straight, then the discourse suggests you are lacking in masculinity, and if one is lacking in masculinity then one is feminine". To complicate this further, there is a biased assumption especially among black men that homosexuality is not an inherently 'African' construct. It is often viewed as a white, western construct. This notion was highly visible during debates centering on homophobia and homosexuality during actual tutorials. This aspect will be explored in detail during interview sessions with research participants. Nevertheless, South African psychologist Kopano Ratele (cited in Louw, 2001: 288) seems to dispel the earlier description when he asserts that with regard to African men, "there is no coherent and stable manhood [or rather] queer and straight black man, modern and traditional black man, professional black man and unskilled black man".

Dunbar Moodie (cited in Louw, 2001) whose fascinating tales titled *'Black Migrant Mine Labourers and the Vicissitudes of Male Desire'* tell of extraordinary accounts of former male miners sexual lives in Pondoland in the eastern Transkei, South Africa. In summary, it tells of how migrant black mining workers were forced to adapt their masculine identities and re-align their sexual desires in line with the situation in the mines. In this way, older males took

on younger males as partners. The latter also performed both sexual and physical wifely duties as well. There was however a catch in that the younger boys took on the homosexual roles so as to get monetary favours from their older lovers and use it to pay for bride price by way of cattle for a female wife and to build a respectable homestead back in eastern Transkei. The interesting trade-of meant that "men became 'wives' on the mines in order to become husbands and therefore full 'men' more rapidly at home" (ibid: 305).

Homosexuality gets played out as a subordinate masculinity because of its interconnection between gender and sexuality. Popular constructs of what it is to be a 'real man' as suggested by Alsop *et al.* (2002) is learnt from dominant discourses of being a heterosexual man. The erroneous end result of a homosexual identification is an assumed femininity due to the lack thereof of a masculine identity. Nevertheless, at the same time, these effeminate characteristics may and can be viewed as a way of challenging dominant notions of hetero-male sexual and physical behaviour. This is quite apt in a culture that encourages and sometimes even dictates to men the need to prove their masculinity through highly visible heterosexual performances and prowess.

Although South Africa's progressive post-apartheid constitution formally recognises gay (and lesbian) culture with the recent formalisation and legalisation of same sex marriages as proof and the spatial visibility of gays and lesbians, it is still an uphill task for them to get accepted in wider societal circles and hence their division under subordinated masculinities. And even as gay men do exhibit a multiplicity of ways of doing and enacting their own masculinity, it is mostly tied down to some dominant hegemonic constructs. bell (sic) hooks interlocking system of domination once again comes to bear in light of class, race and gender hierarchies in which "white gay men, as white men of any sexual orientation benefit from white cultural dominance" (ibid: 149).

Homosexuality as assigned under a subordinated masculinity may however be teased out as a reaction to the restrictive patterns and norms that identify popular gender identity and roles. Influential feminist theorist Judith Butler's interpretation of enacted gender roles/identities as a performance comes to bear. The identities contained therein in various performances are tied down to recognised societal/cultural constructs. Butler (1999: 22) asserts that "persons only become intelligible through or become gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility". The usual standard measure of one's masculinity and as a means of policing gender in this case is one's heterosexuality. As a

means of interrogating shifting (and in this instance subsidiary) masculinities, we can ask: "Do male bodies living male lives add up to authentic masculinities" as Halberstam (2002: 353) does ask. Perhaps the gender order is been re-assigned or that homosexuality is been used by some men to re-assert their identities that have so far been boxed in. Subordinate masculinities are thus named because "they fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility [and] appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities" (Butler, 1999: 24).

As alluded to before, men are under constant watch from other men so as to judge the veracity of their manhood. Kimmel (2001: 33) acquiesces saying: "other men watch us, rank us, [and] grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval". We might then rightly question if perhaps men are feeling these gender pressures more urgently or perhaps more uncomfortably. Homosexuality may then be a measure of the ambiguity of masculinities in gender relations that contains many multi-layered complexities of resistance and change to conformed and constructed standards. Towards this end, Waetjen (2006: 10) advocates for a "conception of gender power that accounts for the paradoxes and contradictions associated with men's power, social location, and identity in modern society" so as to interrogate the political agency of these renegotiated masculinities.

Louw's (2001) rationalisation for the propulsion of homosexuality and increased same sex marriages albeit under a restrictive, oppressive and sometimes confrontational homophobic atmosphere in South Africa was due to the end of apartheid in the 1980's. He argues that "the creation of a democratic society in the 1990's produced the political and social space for new expressions of sexuality and constructions of masculinity" (ibid: 295). Other than the effect the latter reaction had on a macro-level, on a more personal level, a visible homosexual culture now "challenged existing narrow and prescriptive ideas of what it means to be a man" (ibid).

But even as men are renegotiating their masculine identities and identifying homosexuality as one of the many possible defining cultures and identities, also hand in hand with this is the development of homophobic feelings towards homosexuals by heterosexuals. Homophobia is simply the intolerance of or hatred for homosexuals. Nevertheless, American pro-men feminist theorist Michael Kimmel suggests that homophobia is much more than just the straightforward hatred for homosexuals or anything that portrays or acts out homosexual

tendencies. His ideas stem from the hypothesis that men who embody 'real man' hegemonic identities are wholly against other men who seem to be sissies, untough or uncool in their insular minds. This is in addition to purging anti-feminine tendencies in men. Kimmel goes on to describe it as "the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men" (2001: 35).

Homophobia stems from the interpretation of homosexuality as a "subversion, conscious or unconscious of 'the normal' whatever that may be as different cultures impose different criteria of normality" (Buchbinder, 1994: 63). Overt homophobic behaviour may take the form of verbal taunts, physical violence, and open ridicule and in some cases moral, legal and/or religious coercion. In this case then, homophobic tendencies may be linked to the protection of hegemonic masculine identity because the over-riding factor seems to be in the defence of what is considered to be a normative behaviour type.

But even among men who espouse hegemonic identities, bell hooks's interlocking system of domination that is inclusive of race and class comes to bear in a profound way. These variables play out to mark some men as being more worthy than others, usually based on colour. This has meant that within individual male movements, came a realisation that "classifying men as the 'gender of oppression' did not mean that men are not oppressed along with other dimensions particularly by those of class and race" (Dominelli, 2002: 92). The colonial projects over the rest of Africa and the apartheid system in South Africa interpreted human relationships on a master/servant scale based on colour. Connell (1995: 80) notes that:

> Hegemonic, subordination and complicity … are relations internal to the
> gender order. The interplay of gender with other structures such as class
> and race creates further relationships between masculinities.

The relationship borne out of class and race is what Connell (ibid) terms as marginalised masculinities. Synonyms attached to the word marginal such as peripheral, negligible, minimal, insignificant, minor and small relay the true meaning of being marginalised. The act or verb attachment to the word marginal conjures up images of being left out or being treated as less than another person. Therefore how masculinities may be and are constructed according to ideologies of race and ethnicity filter down in terms of gendered identities internally accrued and externally depicted in their actions.

In South Africa, the divisive apartheid system as discussed before worked to undermine the intrinsic value of especially black men over white men. Systematic psychological

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dehumanisation wrought on black men worked to negate their value as human beings. Further, it worked to de-emasculate black men of their assumed essentialist macho and authoritarian identity against not only black women but white women as well. The latter destabilises assumed notions we have of all men in general being authoritarian as the patriarchal order is reversed as black men were forced into submissive obeisance to white women. This put men in a position of powerlessness that may have invariably played out its course as a confrontational and violent masculinity type in a post-apartheid South Africa (But these same negative identities found some positive element in the struggle for independence as warriors, freedom fighters etc.). In addition, the colonial projects coupled with the influence from western or European contact imparted on black men an inferiority complex. Traditional gender hierarchical systems were also displaced. Barker and Ricardo (2006: 164) explain it best thus:

> Colonisation undermined some of the powers of the traditional big man and created new big men baking by colonial authority. From the time of colonisation, Sub-Saharan African men and manhood have often been constructed in relation to European manhood ... The literature on Sub-Saharan African manhood reveals numerous examples of colonisers who questioned or criticised the masculinities of the people in the countries they colonised.

The representation of difference is enshrined in attaching negative standards to one group and positive remarks to another. Hall (2000: 229) describes them as being represented through "sharply opposed polarised and binary extremes [consisting of] good/bad, civilised/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic". It is in this way that a hierarchy of a displaced category labelled the "other"[8] is created within masculinities. Labels such as the "other" involves "creating an individual or group in a super-ordinate position and others in subordinate ones by defining them as inferior compared to the dominant ones by focussing on differences and categorising these as deficits or less desirable" (Dominelli, 2002: 88).

We can draw parallels of the struggles of black South African men in carving out their masculine identities amidst racial taunts with the challenges African American men continue to face to date in the USA. Clatterbaugh (2001: 409) expounds on this experience noting that: "understanding Black men means recognising that in America, adult Black males have been Black 'men' for only about twenty years [and] even during this time, black males have not been recognised as 'socially approved' men". Ross 1998, cited in Morrell, 2001: 10)

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[8] The "other" is also used to loosely term homosexual/gay men to name them as being different from heterosexual men. It however takes on a pejorative quality in the difference that is being acknowledged.

acknowledges the positioning of black men in the USA as being "underrepresented when it comes to positions of power and wealth, and are overrepresented in prisons". The statistics given by Clatterbaugh (2001; 410) are even more damning. He notes that one in four black males between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine is either in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole while forty-four percent of the prisoners in the United States are black males.

The following chapter explores some factors such as cultural prescriptions and social conditioning among others that invariably shape these identities. Towards this end, a social constructionist and pro-men feminist theory will be interrogated.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Hughes (2002: 6) acknowledges the fact that any text is built on some kind of theoretical or conceptual framework that may or may not be made explicit. However, the value or advantage of working within the confines of a theoretical framework "places the knowledge presented in a broader epistemological and ontological field" (ibid). Bertrand and Hughes (2005: 262) aptly describe a theory as a "set of concepts, derived from and contributing to a model, which together explain a phenomenon or practice". A theory therefore assists in carrying forward the various structured ideas within this research whilst at the same time acting as a point of origin for the ideas and views contained in this discussion. This section therefore captures the theories that underpin my investigation of masculine identities. It helps clarify and solidify arguments I hold of identities being a social construct and how (some) men thus become interpolated by various traditional belief systems they embrace through social conditioning.

Whilst acting as the origin of ideas, theories also help to facilitate the "connection of ideas" as Albrow (1999: 41) notes. This connection of ideas concerns itself with facilitating and consolidating the link between a researcher's concerns, aims and objectives with particular aspects of the tangible realities of their studies. It thus enables researchers to "connect ideas of unity, identity, repetition and sequence" (ibid). Within feminist research circles, any ensuing critiques and grounded theoretical frameworks have "highlighted the gendered nature of social relations in all spheres of public and private life" (Dominelli, 2002: 5). Most feminist theory and practice has thus "revealed men as privileged at the expense of women in many dimensions of social existence" (ibid) and thus most of the theoretical frameworks used within feminist research address men as perpetrators of gender inequalities. However, emergent feminist theories such as pro-men feminism, have realised that "the latent effect of seeing feminist research as exclusively about women's lives is that it allows things male to go uninvestigated, almost as though the idea of the male-as-norm were not been questioned any more" (Layland, 1990: 129).

The theoretical frameworks that I will use to ground my research are the social constructionist theory and pro-men feminist theory. The former stems from the gender perspective that assigns gendered roles and attributes as been socially constructed. The latter

theory on pro-men feminism provides an opportunity or a gateway for the interrogation of men and their attendant identities as a gendered construct. Inadvertently I may be questioning whether or to what extent the male students who undertake the gender studies module actively engage with the content they encounter and if they are positively influenced by it in terms of reconstituting their identities.

3.2 Social Constructionist Theory

Social constructionism is a sociological theory of knowledge developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1966. Its focus was to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in their perceived reality. It involves looking at the way social phenomenon is created, institutionalised and made into tradition by humans (Wikipedia, N.d). Bilton *et al.* (1996: 200) define social constructionism as "the process whereby 'natural', [and] instinctive forms of behaviour become mediated by social processes...and in this way [become] socially constructed". Principally, society and its social institutions, arrangements and conventions thus predate us and box us into pre-defined identities of feminine and masculine. Going hand in hand with this are the gendered roles that accompany these identities which are either taught or learnt.

Processes of social constructionism may be achieved through socialisation which is the process through which these culturally mediated norms, values and identities are learnt. Bilton *et al.* (1996: 205) describe it as "an on-going process whereby individuals learn to conform to society's prevailing norms and values". Here, infant boys and girls learn what is expected of their different sexes. Reinforcement in terms of praise and gift presentation is given to those who conform while punishment by either physical or verbal retribution or societal exclusion is meted on deviants. Processes of modelling or imitation copied from parents or older members of society serve to internalise taught behaviour. Cultural and/or traditional values are also used as a spring board for learning attendant gender roles. The responses alluded to by some of the participants acknowledged the key role that cultural beliefs initially play in building up one's worldview. Thus, belief systems formed are hard to shake even in the face of an alternative, progressive-seeking view. This theory therefore enables a deeper interrogation of how some identities are reinforced or maintained, newly acquired, questioned, changed or completely abandoned in the face of personal introspection. In the same vein, it may explain why it becomes harder to scrutinise some of those identities that may be negative due to an internalisation and acceptance of them as the norm or standard.

Nonetheless, social conditioning and socialisation processes as espoused in social constructionism point at identity formations that define gendered identities of the self. Stockard and Johnson (1980) reiterate that "the basic gender characteristics of the sexes are learned in the family environment very early in life and are then reinforced in the schools, in peer groups, in the mass media and many other specific agencies...". This elaborate training makes female and male children effectively and quickly learn their roles and thus define their agency in society. Some of the participants in the study acknowledge their complacency in passively accepting some roles and identities due to taught and almost ritualistic behavioural and identity patterns. Robertson (1987: 327) points at three psychological processes through which children learn to internalise taught roles:

1. Conditioning – This is through rewards and punishment, usually in the form of parental (and to a large extent, societal) approval or disapproval;

2. Imitation – Here, young children tend to imitate older children and adults, and are particularly inclined to imitate those whom they regard as most like themselves. We should bear in mind that the older children and adults similarly went through gender insensitive socialisation processes in most cases;

3. Self-definition – Through social interaction with others, children learn to categorise the people around them into two sexes and to label themselves as belonging to one sex rather than the other. Kohlberg, 1996 (cited in Robertson, 1987) adds that "they (children) then use this self-definition to select their future interests and to construct their personalities and social roles".

This study thus realises that in the end, these taught or learnt gender roles and identities are then reinforced later in various ways and at different places in society and community life. Other than the family structure, institutions can and very easily do provide an avenue for consolidating different identities mostly arising from peer pressure and/or the sheer need to conform in order to be accepted.

Kimmel (1987: 12) faults the study of gender that used a 'sex-role' model that "specified the ways in which biological males and biological females became socialised as men and women in particular cultures". This is because sex roles assigned use explicit biological or anatomical difference in men and women to define their roles. The presence of a vagina in women would thus be automatically interpreted as a reproductive function whilst the penis for men would symbolise authority if one gives it a phallocentric reading. Masculinity is a social construct is thus defined as a "gendered phenomenon" (Connell, 1995) that refers to

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how a man comes to be characterised. Bilton *et al.* (1996: 200) define masculinity as: "Various socially constructed collections of assumptions, expectations and ways of behaving that serve as standards for forms of male behaviour". They point to a strain of social constructionist theory where gender identities are viewed as a product of social encounters and relationships (see also Evans, 2003; Ngcongo, 1993 and de la Rey, 1992). Morrell (2001: 8) argues that masculinity "is constructed in the context of class, race and other factors which are interpreted through the prism of age". To further augment this interpretation within a socio-cultural perspective, Epstein & Johnson, 1998 (cited in Morrell, 2001: 8) offer that:

> Human agents cannot stand outside culture and wield power precisely as they wish. Power is always limited and shaped by systems of knowledge which also shapes the subjects and objects of power...Power/knowledge position us as subjects of particular kinds. They put pressure on us to adopt particular identities...in this particular sense, power and knowledge as discourse 'constructs' social identities.

Framing the social constructionist approach that emerged in the 1960's, a "distinction is made in order to counter the biological determinism from which it is argued that one's biological sex determines one's social and cultural characteristics and roles" (Squires, 2000: 55). Roles and identities as to feminine or masculine are therefore appointed and taught (Sobieraj, 1998: 16). De Beauvoir's claim (cited in ibid) that "...one is not born. One becomes a woman", stresses the role of tradition and culture in conditioning women to adopt inferior roles, and subsequently, superior roles for men. The salient note in De Beauvoir's assertion is the idea that children are born genderless but only acquire certain traits and characteristics through repeated indoctrination. Butler (1990: 8) reasons it out saying:

> If sex, as well as gender, is a construct, it follows that the body does not have a pre-given essential sex. Rather bodies are rendered intelligible through gender and cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender. Bodies become gendered through the continual performance of gender.

Rubin's (1975) argument of a gender system that constructs two different value systems for both the sexes which concentrates and rests power in the hands of patriarchs articulates the point at which oppressive masculinity systems are birthed. Evans (2003: 5) sees it as a case of acquiring our gendered selves through socialisation, and the internalisation of social expectations. Low (2003: 378) goes as far as to suggest that "...a man could be more than his manhood, but a man who did not posses the qualities of courage, self-mastery and capacity for violence that constituted contemporary masculinity was something other, or less than a man". If we read from Low's script, he tends to suggest that to some extent, men themselves measure each other up and if the scales are not tipped in favour of the qualities

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that are mentioned, then one's assertion as a man is in jeopardy. Pointers to this overt measurement in this study emerge when focussing on homosexuality and homophobia as forms of identification. Men who are homosexual thus report that their identity as being wholly male comes into question by (some) heterosexual men and they are therefore seen as effeminate and lacking of the full measure of masculinity. Bilton *et al.* (1996: 200) argue the attendant differences instilled as:

> Gender differences derived from social and cultural processes create systems of ideas and practices about gender that vary across time and space. They also create gender divisions of labour, allocating men and women to different activities and responsibilities. Individuals raised within such a framework will come to have appropriately gendered identities and desires.

A key argument that is central to the premise of this dissertation is one forwarded by Burr (1998: 13) that offers a place for the re-constituting of socialised gendered activities and roles. She offers a case for what she terms 'constructive alternativism' which situates the idea that there exists a potentially infinite number of alternative constructions of events, in this case, socialised norms and values. Her take is that:

> If we take ourselves and others to be constructions and not objective descriptions, and if it is human beings who have built these constructions, then it is [at least in principle] possible to re-create constructs of ourselves in ways which might be more facilitating for us…

Advancing Burr's argument then gives an avenue for acknowledging that men (and indeed women) cannot be viewed as passive agents but active ones that are involved in the constructions of their identities and thus have a choice as to what beliefs they will internalise. This suggests a dialogue of sorts between men and cultural messaging in which the former is in a constant state or motion of negotiating with, influencing, appropriating, or even resisting and effecting change with the cultural messages they come into contact with. In this way, men can be encouraged to take a more participatory interest in women's agendas and become pro-active partners in creating change. This is because as Connell (2000: 14) suggests: "masculinities are neither programmed in our genes, nor fixed by social structure [just as femininity is not], prior to social interaction".

Gender stratification gleaned from cultural constructionism provides a powerful means by which different genders are either recognised or devalued. "These categorical imperatives govern our lives in the most profound and pervasive ways, through our social experiences and practices" says Lorber (2001: 28). That our worldview is formatted from this nurturing

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makes it an important consideration in addressing gender inequality due to its pool of power. I shall then discuss a few examples of the ways in which cultural constructs come to define masculine identity by citing various accounts of anthropological ethnographic gendered research.

3.2.1 Men Interpolated by Culture

Ortner, 1974 (cited in Brettell and Sargent, 2001: 157) define culture as "the notion of human consciousness, or…the products of human consciousness (i.e., systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature". Culture however also encompasses beliefs, traditions and/or rituals that come to define individuals and/or communal values and ways of life of a people. What we however need to understand is that cultural beliefs *per se* may not be inherently bad but it is the symbolic construction by which we evaluate and apportion gender identities that may be problematic. Women for example are linked with nurturing roles because of their reproductive capacities while men are linked to authoritative functions such as head-of-the-house, decision maker etc.

The importance of cultural practices in our lives cannot be gainsaid. This is even despite the contestations modern men/women attach to their images due to the salient hold cultural beliefs have over us either in covert or overt ways. Participants in this study took cognizance of the fact that though they lived largely cosmopolitan, and in a sense, modern lives, they still had deep attachments to ingrained cultural beliefs. de la Rey (1992: 78) contends that: "So much of how we choose to live is an enactment of cultures and traditions which take gender specific forms". Cultural gender insensitivity plays out in the way our traditions attach significance to certain milestones in our lives as human beings that give succinct distinctions to the importance (or otherwise) of being either male or female. Traditions accompanying birth, puberty and adolescents, sexuality, sexual relationships, marriage and even death inscribe in us gender specific cultural identities and attendant roles.

South Africa has a semblance of an assortment of various cultures, and indeed we do speak of a myriad of traditional African cultures, Indian cultures and White culture that takes its roots in Western culture. And even within African cultures there is still a dynamic mix of Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho etc. traditions. de la Rey (ibid: 85) however notes that: "While there are differences in the specific [and varied] practices, there are gender-related features that our backgrounds have in common for example the evidence that women are undervalued and anything associated with women seems to be evaluated negatively". The cultural construction

of gender in a particular society involves defined roles that are given to both men and women. The positions entrusted to men include head-of-the-house, elder/chief, custodian and enforcer of specific traditions, warrior, decision-maker etc. These roles then prescribe certain identities and behaviour patterns that get to erroneously be misrepresented as being inherent, natural or biologically given.

The social construction of masculine identities through cultural prescription works through various mechanisms using rituals and taboos. As noted before, these identities are enforced through a system of rewards and punishments. Most taboos lay down what punishment is given to disobedience. Brettell and Sargent (2001: 158) report on ethnographic research done into the cultural construction of gender and personhood amongst the Sambia in New Guinea which is very rigid. They note that:

> The Sambia, like many other societies in New Guinea, are characterized by a high degree of segregation and sexual antagonism between men and women, both of which are reinforced by powerful taboos. These taboos, and other facets of Sambian male identity including that of the warrior, are inculcated during a series of initiation rituals whereby boys are "grown" into men.

These rituals effectively detach boys from women, mostly mothers and sisters, with whom they may have shared the first six or seven years of their lives with. An important note is that whilst the initiation ceremonies for the males carry much pomp and ceremony, for the women, "...the transition to womanhood is often part of a more subtle and continuous process of enculturation and socialisation" (ibid).

These rites however, serve to inculcate cultural knowledge and expected gendered behaviour. Cultural expectations regarding social responsibilities and their conduct as men in the community are transmitted during initiation ceremonies. Afterwards, men are afforded numerous privileges associated with their new found status. Amongst the Xhosa people, Stinson (N.d) notes that initiation is seen as the "formal incorporation of males into Xhosa religious and tribal life, and before circumcision, a male cannot marry or start a family, inherit possessions, nor officiate in ritual ceremonies".

Cultural anthropologist Gilbert Herdt who undertook a study titled *'Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea'* notes that a violent and fearsome identity was encouraged and inculcated into young males. As such, "warfare used to be a constant and nagging among Sambia, and it conditioned the values and masculine stereotypes surrounding

the male identity cult" (Herdt, 2001: 163). Strong and tough masculine identities were built up at this time as been ideal. Peoples (2001: 15) notes that amongst the Awa people in New Guinea, the rituals marking the passage into adulthood amongst the boys "imparted important masculine qualities like courage, strength, aggressiveness and tolerance of pain".

Another cultural anthropologist David Gilmore gives an equally fascinating account of how the transition from childhood into adulthood amongst a group of pastoralists in East Africa occurs. Amongst the Masai, Rendile, Jie and Samburu in Kenya, Gilmore (2001: 209) notes that the young boys are taken away from their mothers and families at the outset of adolescents. They are then submitted to bloody circumcision rites which occur publicly. Here, the boys are warned not to so much as flinch, blink an eye, turn their heads or even worse cry out in pain. Should the young initiate do any of the latter, "he is shamed for life as unworthy of manhood, and his entire lineage is shamed as a nursery of weaklings" (ibid).

For most urban, modern, contemporary men, cultural ceremonies like initiation/circumcision still holds sway. Indeed my participants acknowledged that there are however other indicators by which men either amongst themselves in peer groups or otherwise, measure themselves as being "real men". I nevertheless acknowledge that there are various subjective definitions given to what constitutes a 'real man' according to differing cultural groupings, races or even urban and rural based men. There is however usually an over riding standard of what an ideal masculinity consists of that more often than not bears some similarities across the board. Such identities are usually gleaned from hegemonic constructs that "refers to a particular idealised image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalised and subordinated" (Barrett, 2001: 79). I will further discuss the responses gleaned from my participants in this respect in chapter 5.

The above narration on cultural prescriptions of masculine identity through various rites in no way legitimates the assumption that so long as one is circumcised, then they will automatically follow through with actualising the given identities. Lorber nonetheless points out that "most people, however voluntarily go along with their society's prescriptions for those of their gender status, because the norms and expectations get built into their sense of worth and dignity" (2001: 28). Anthropologist Paul Dover's ethnographic study of the Goba people in Zambia tells of other ways other than circumcision through which young boys attain adulthood. The main thesis of his study titled: *'Gender and Embodiment: Expectations*

of Manliness in a Zambian Village' whilst investigating the performance of the sexed body within an HIV/Aids framework, touched on the construction of gendered identities; both masculine and feminine. Dover found out that the Goba people like most Shona speakers, did not have male initiation ceremonies as seen in the narratives above. Instead, when the boys came of age at the onset of early puberty, they are separated from their mothers. They live in a *dare*[9] hut with a kinship of other boys under the tutelage of an older boy. Here, they would be instructed in the ways of the Goba people, learn ancient customary secrets and listen to the knowledge of the elders. But there was a toughness instilled as the young boys had to serve the senior men in the *dare* hut whilst undergoing various trials to prove themselves. From their experiences, the men tellingly conclude: "It made men of us and taught us respect" (Dover, 2005: 176).

The toughness instilled in boys was however not by chance but occurred through the distinct gendered roles each of the sexes was permitted to carry out. Among the Sotho and Nguni South African tribes, Hammond-Tooke (1993: 133) notes that after six years old, the differentiated roles "became evident, signalling the marked social segregation of the sexes that was characteristic of adult life". In this way, activities the boys carried out such as competitive duelling with sticks, frequent fighting between gangs of different wards and forays into the veld or bush to feed the cattle imparted lessons of resilience and fortitude. Hammond-Tooke (ibid) remarks that:

> The interaction between boys of differing ages allowed for leadership
> and management of others … and endless, halcyon days spent in the
> veld or bush meant hat the boys developed an intimate and extensive
> knowledge of the veld and wild life. The life of girls was very different.
> Confined to the homestead, they assisted their mothers in caring for the
> smaller children, collecting relishes, stamping and so on. This meant
> that long before puberty they were competent little housewives.

These socialisation processes that normalised women's relative subservient position within some cultural confines came to define men's superior position. Of significance also was the proliferation of pollution beliefs associated mainly with child birth and menstruation. Hammond-Tooke (1993) notes that the Zulu speaking people in South Africa "conceived of pollution in terms of 'darkness' (*umnyama* or *umswazi* in Zulu) which seems to have dirt-like qualities". This dirt like quality took on gendered overtones and was typically associated with a woman who had recently given birth, a menstruating woman, and with a girl who became

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[9] *Dare* in Goba can refer to the boy's hut, a gathering place for the men, and the headman's customary court for settling disputes.

pregnant before marriage. In all this, "the danger was to men, whose virility suffered through contact" (ibid: 180).

Women's servitude in relation to men's dominance was also extended to cultural constructs concerning sexuality. There were more stringent rules and regulations set for women than men. Bonvillain (1995: 108) observes that amongst the Mpondo chiefdom in the Transkei region of South Africa, "premarital sexual behaviour on the part of girls is severely criticized and punished, whereas such behaviour in boys is considered normal and acceptable".

Nevertheless, while there are still men who religiously buy into scripted hegemonic identities, there are others who are engaging in alternative discourses that recognise gender parity. This next section explores such changing dimensions.

3.2.2 Renegotiated Masculinities

The institutionalisation of patriarchy has resulted in the continued and erroneous stereotyping of an errant masculinity type that strengthens culturally stereotyped roles and identities assigned to the male gender. Nevertheless, shifting changes in social, technical and economic spheres over the last decade or so has seen shifts in masculine identities. Barrett and Whitehead (2001: 9) concur saying "there can be no denying the fact that not only have there been significant social transformations outside the control of any group or individual, but the implication of these changes for men, particularly working-class men are particularly profound". Increased opportunities for (some) women in what had been largely male-dominated professional and industrialised service industries, increasing freedom in choice over relationships, divorce, child-bearing, contraceptive use and sexual expression, and having dual incomes in the home arena which translates into shared power has meant a shift in what were highly stringent gender roles.

The foregoing changes have meant at best an interrogation of men's perceptions of their privileged position within the gender hierarchy or at worst a denial of the change in status. Holistic gender and development programmes that emerged started working at challenging the status quo and a societal system that undermined men's contribution to the feminist field. It was realised that men as situated in masculinities were not a homogeneous group (Connell, 2002) but a heterogeneous one. The latter argued that socially created divisions amongst men operated as binary systems of domination and subordination that set up hierarchies of

privilege amongst men themselves. (Some) men therefore began engaging in feminism movements and working side by side women to address questions of inequality that were prevalent. This novelty begot questions such as: "Can men be feminists? Is male feminism even viable?" Shail (cited in Gillis *et al.* 2004: 97). The idea of male feminists was however met with scepticism and such encounters continue to meet resistance to date. However, within individual male movements came a realisation that "classifying men as the 'gender of oppression' did not men that men are not oppressed along with other dimensions, particularly by those of class and race" (Dominelli 2002: 92).

Heterogeneous masculinities thus ensued because men realised that they too suffered from rigid sex roles (Connell, 2000), that were restrictive to the enjoyment of all their faculties. Issues of class/race and disproportionate share of power all helped to contribute to the overdue query of a privileged male gender. "Within the dominant culture, the masculinity that defined white, middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men against which other men were measured and, more often than not, found wanting" (Kimmel, 2001: 31) was a catalyst to a reactionary and interrogative masculinity. Some of this introspection may not have been triggered by a desire to explore differences and inequalities from a purely gendered perspective but from back lash received from lifestyle choices made. This implicitly applies to homosexuals as revealed by some of my participants who are homosexuals who reported to having become more sensitive and alert to gender issues after receiving some negative criticism about their sexual identity. Nevertheless, this awakening concomitantly with changing gender identity and roles emerged as (some) men began questioning their role too, as oppressors of the female gender. Coles (2001) takes an optimistic note of the evolving change in building a masculine discourse and views it as an entry point for initiating change, as opposed to cursorily dismissing gender issues simply as merely feminist rhetoric.

Barker and Ricardo (2006: 14) are convinced that urbanisation and the expansion of formal education, and the increased enrolment of girls in public education, are also leading to changes in definitions of gender roles in general, and in manhoods specifically. Whilst I have earlier made reference to emerging violent masculinities in a formal school setting through Deevia Bhana's study, Barker and Ricardo are however optimistic about schools been sites for positive engagement for young boys. They note that "formal schooling clearly also has an impact on the social construction of masculinities, and is a space for constructing, creating or reinforcing specific versions of manhood" (ibid). The hope, while very subjective, is that

formal education can possibly be an avenue for nurturing modern and rational men who deconstruct gender inequalities through critical reflection. The participants in this study were specifically questioned about their motivation to undertake the gender studies module in order to gauge levels of sincerity or otherwise. I have therefore chosen the pro-men feminist theory as an engagement with men who may be re-constructing their identities.

3.3 Pro-men Feminist Theory

Morell (2001) posits that the 1990's recognised masculinity as a key aspect of gender. The trickle down effect resulted in the coinage of a new feminist order; post-feminist men, to represent a stream of the modern man's movement that was sympathetic towards women issues. This revolutionised man is termed as "New Man" (ibid). Pro-feminist men are thus men who are actively supportive of feminism and of efforts to bring about gender justice and equality (Flood, 2002). These groups of men believe that women as a group suffer inequalities in society, while men as a group receive various forms of power and institutional privilege (ibid). They thus seek social harmony and gender equity by trying to upset oppressive patriarchal orders in establishment. Pro-men feminist theory borrows a leaf from poststruculturalism and finds women's insubordination as been socially constructed through language and power. Power is often exercised not only through direct coercion, but also through the way language shapes and restricts our reality. Bilton *et al.* (1996: 130) perceived this fragmentation of power as a:

> Cultural and aesthetic phenomenon associated with contemporary literature and the arts. It often combines apparently opposed elements to subvert meaning and fragment totality. It is characterised by a pastiche of cultural styles and elements but implies a deeper scepticism about order and progress. Instead, diversity and fragmentation are celebrated.

Steans (1985: 15) proffers that the *raison d'état* for the feminist movement was "to bring about change that would end discrimination practices and realize equal rights for women from all spheres of life". Radical feminist thought centralises patriarchy as the root of men's domination and hence women's oppression. This has been a central thesis for the feminist debate as noted elsewhere in this dissertation. Paradoxically, the same has served as an anti-thesis faulted for the relegation of the male gender within the gender discourse. A post-modern feminism constructed around a "way of thinking and speaking that allows for an openness, plurality, diversity and difference" (ibid: 26) is thus hoped for.

Alsop *et al.* (2002) and Butler (1993) relay concerns as to the subjugation and misrepresentation of those who are labelled as the "other" that will include the male gender

(for purposes of this study). hooks (sic) (1986) invariably warns feminists to be wary of perpetuating patriarchal (in women's case, matriarchal) tendencies as the line between the oppressor and the oppressed becomes thin and often blurred. The interface between domination and victimisation thus amplifies the masculinity debate within a gendered discourse. Conversely, in a matriarchal structure, the family formation would base its authority in the hands of the oldest female (Popenoe, 1995:313). "There is however no solid evidence to suggest that women ever held the level of familial and, therefore societal authority that men do [command] now" (ibid). In cases where women held substantial positions of power, there was an absence of the dominant male figure due to war or migrant labour. Nevertheless, most dominant matrifocal patterns are commonly played out in mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships.

Pro-feminist theory, viewed as an of-shoot of post-modernism feminist theory in this way is thus a celebration of a new system of thought that seeks to embrace both genders on egalitarian terms. Noting its timely departure from other schools of feminism, Oakely, 1997 (cited in Davies, 2004: 110) says:

> Whereas first-wave feminism focused on the question of women's civil and legal rights, second-wave feminism is distinguished for taking up the challenge contained in Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion that women are not born but made... But, just as time has moved on for feminism and women since the beginning of second-wave feminism, so it has moved on for gender too [and hence the entry of post-modern feminism movements].

Davies (ibid) explains the shift in post modernism as "an understanding of (sexual) identity that moves across and beyond conventional categories of gender". This essentially means a shift from what we have conventionally defined as 'masculine' or 'feminine' through a gendered lens to a naturalness of essential female and male sexes that thrives on inclusivity. Segal, 1999 (cited in ibid: 11) reminds us that "gender [identities and roles] are 'socially', 'performatively', or 'discursively' constructed..." and can thus change at any time. The shifting goal posts are constructed and re-constructed in accordance with ever-changing spaces and times. This in effect would mean that masculinities and men in themselves are constantly undergoing a transitory period.

Dominelli (2002: 88) offers that the pro-men feminist position "constitutes [one] end of a polarised end of an amorphous collection of men's responses to feminism in what has been loosely termed the 'men's movement'. The latter was largely in reaction to second wave

feminism that tended to centralise and heap the blame of women's oppression in privileged masculine roles. Dominelli traces early beginnings of this movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's in countries such as North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. With interests in father's rights for example and the re-assertion of men as human beings, pro-men feminists have an interest in questioning their socially constructed roles which are stereotypically associated with a knack for violence and control. Further, it is noted that "classifying men as the 'gender of oppression' does not mean that men are not oppressed along with other dimensions, particularly those of class and race. Nor does it imply that men do not suffer under a patriarchal system that exploits them too" (ibid). The 1990's in addition to challenging "assumptions about the gender system, [also] raised a series of problems about men" (Connell, 2000: 3). These arguments therefore offered men an entry point into feminist quarters.

For some of the participants in the study, their lived experiences under very stringent patriarchal fathering styles and violence meted out on their mothers provoked an introspection of their own stance as men. This theory therefore gives me an entry point from which to gauge the sincerity of that engagement either as being surface level or life changing.

But other than recognising men as a worthy gender category, pro-feminist men can offer an opportunity for men themselves to challenge socially constructed stereotypical gender roles. In giving them that platform, it is hoped that men can begin to interrogate and problematise their positions using their culturally privileged status as men. Gutterman (2001: 65) acknowledges the difficulty and the "delicate balancing act" but in the same breadth notes, "by contextualising and critiquing the closed category of male, heterosexual identity, profeminist men pose a unique predicament for cultural discourses of power".

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This chapter focuses on the methodology I used to conduct my research. Traditionally defined, social research is concerned with gathering data that can help answer questions about various aspects of the society and enable us to understand society (Bailey, 1982: 3). This gives us a window through which we can see and comment on various significant social issues. It is ultimately an investigation into constructed lives, so as to "provide answers to questions of theoretical interest to a particular social discipline" (ibid). The interrogative questions and answers interpreted as findings are accrued therein. Feminist research however is specifically concerned with the absence of women in certain contexts and the invisibility of women in others, when they are in fact ubiquitous. Having said that, it might seem paradoxical that this study exclusively focuses on men's identities given the former hue and cry from various feminist quarters, which in itself is a legitimate concern. But as I have argued in preceding chapters, excluding men from the gender equality debate may serve the same purpose as creating an implicit 'other' category.

Throughout this research, a feminist standpoint has been utilised and the research methodology is no different. Sceptics might ask (and rightly so) if there is such a thing as a 'feminist methodology'. Sarantakos (1998: 67) notes that one of the ideals of feminist research is that it "is not geared towards standardised ideals of statistical principles but rather towards self-defined objectives". An over-aching objective of this research is to put 'gender' at the centre of social inquiry. Towards this end, in as much as feminist research was born out of a need to rectify years of patriarchal elements of social research, the emphasis on pro-men feminism necessitates the interrogation of the masculine gender to achieve gender equity.

What a study on men does as Kimmel (1987: 11) argues, is that it "seeks to buttress, to augment women's studies, to complete the radically redrawn portrait of gender that women's studies has begun. This research is however exploratory and seeks to provide an insight into a world in which the gender order has began raising probing questions for men and boys. Some of the themes I explored during the research process included: diversity in masculine identities and the relationship between different kinds of masculinity; those of subordinate, complicit or dominant characteristics and the effect of urbanisation and contemporary lifestyles on these identities. Another salient theme explored some of the conditions and requirements imposed socially and culturally on men and how these produce masculinity.

In light of the above, a qualitative research type was more conversant with this study because it "aims towards the exploration of social relations, and describes reality as experienced by the respondents" (Sarantakos, 1998: 6). The participants are therefore conceived as being active agents and contributors of the actual research process given that they are in and continue to live in the situations that are being researched. Respondents are thus not reduced to mere variables as their voices are given an unfettered avenue of expression and their agency is fully recognised. A key feminist research principle envisions a symbiotic relationship between the researcher and the participant(s) that enhances mutual constitutive learning. Thus, Kirsch (1999: 4) notes that feminist researchers "collaborate with participants as much as possible so that growth and learning can be mutually beneficial, interactive and co-operative".

Though qualitative methods of research are increasingly gaining favour from feminist researchers, there are concerns arising from navigating through the private and public lives of research participants. This is in light of the fact that in building thematic themes arising from qualitative interviews, the research itself involves tracing historical backgrounds and life stories that are private and putting them into the public domain as academic rigour demands. For Kirsch (1999: 3), the recurring problem is that for as long as a researcher "is seeking to be heard by a public academic audience [they] cannot evade the necessity to interpret the world and understandings of the other into a discourse of knowledge and culture". This problematic area will be further discussed in the data collection and analysis section of this chapter.

The push towards the usage of qualitative research methods in and of itself should not imply that quantitative research methods are not equally dependable within a feminist stance. Nevertheless, feminist dilemmas in broad terms usually centre on proving qualitative methods as a viable and legitimate form of research. Edwards and Ribbens (1998: 4) indeed take cognizance of this fact saying:

> Qualitative research almost inevitably appears 'unconvincing' within this relationship because dominant understandings of concepts of 'validity', 'reliability' and 'representativeness' are passed within a numerical rather than a process framework. In contrast, researchers working within a quantitative framework rarely have to explain the underlying epistemological basis of their work within the terms of qualitative research.

Due to the interpretive nature of this research, a qualitative methodology worked best. Overall, as stated before, the active agency reflective of the participants proved to be a dynamic venture. Participants cease to be mere pawns in the research process but rather are subjects who "define, explain, interpret and construct reality" (Sarantakos, 1998: 51). As it is their own reality, this provides a deeper and more intimate understanding of their world view.

A crucial critique of qualitative methods is the lack of representativeness and generalisability of the research findings. Representativeness occurs when the "findings from a sampled group reflect the attributes of a target population [and further, that the] conclusions drawn through the study are pertinent to the whole population" (ibid: 26). Qualitative researchers avoid this predicament by employing theoretical sampling methods, which is a form of sampling guided by the principles of the theory that is to be developed. In the case of this research, there were not large numbers of respondents but rather it was fixed to typical cases; that of male and female undergraduate students at Howard College, UKZN who had undertaken the Introduction to Gender Studies module. The choice was therefore out rightly purposive and "not towards representativeness but rather towards suitability" (ibid: 155). A key feature of theoretical sampling is that the choice of participants is guided up-front by a theoretical framework(s) one is pursuing or analysing. In this case, a social constructionist and pro-men feminist standpoint dictated my choice of engaging a qualitative methodology that was mostly exploratory, interpretive and investigative.

4.2 Project Area and Study Sample

As it is often not practical or possible to study an entire population, it becomes necessary to make general findings based on a study of only a subset of the population known as a sample. This research explored the subjective experiences of masculinity by a group of male students. My sample frame was thus drawn from a pool of undergraduate male students[10] who took up an introductory gender studies module in 2006 at UKZN's, Howard College Campus. Nine of them participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 21-to-28 years old (see section 5.2 for a more comprehensive age demographic table of the participants). Though I have earlier dissuaded the notion of representativeness, I should point out that the limited sample size restricts the generalisability of the research findings. My aim is however exploratory and intends to provide an insight into a world in which the gender order has

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[10] My personal interaction with the students provided an insight into how their constructions of either masculine or feminine identities have profound implications on the performance of their gendered roles, and gender biases extended externally. As a result of this interaction, I alerted the students that I would be calling on them as participants of this study and sought their consent.

began raising probing questions for men and boys. Clifford and Marcus (1986) whilst speaking exclusively to ethnographic accounts of research collection, nevertheless warn researchers to be wary of making general assumptions about research findings. They insist that "...our own 'full' versions [of research undertaken] will inevitably appear partial" (ibid: 18) due to the fact that most samples form a microcosm of a constitutive whole. It is nevertheless not in vain to study a select sample size as it invariably forms a sub-section of the whole from which salient exploratory data can be gleaned.

Because gender inscribes relations between both men and women, it means focussing upon masculinity as well as femininity. This involved focussing to a small extent on whether women are indeed playing a role, if any, in identifying ways in which men are reproducing or changing popular versions of masculinity. Therefore, a group of six female students from the same undergraduate module were also included in my sample frame. Their ages ranged from 20-to-24 years. There may be an assumption that choosing participants who have undergone the gender studies module may be defeatist as they may already be aware of their gendered identities, pressures faced by men, and ensuing gender inequalities and imbalances. Buchbinder (1994: ix) however notes the importance of self-examination for men enrolling in such courses as "some [of them] may not be fully aware of the sorts of pressures faced each day by men from the dominant, patriarchal model of masculinity".

Buchbinder (ibid: x) also notes that an omission of ethnic or racial difference in the construction of masculinities has led to the erroneous representation of a white, Anglo, mostly middle-class man as the yardstick. So as not to fall into this trap nor in turn venerate one racial group over another, I included the three racial groupings – Black, White and Indian. I also de-limited this to a minimum of at least three students from each racial category for the males and two each for the females. I used purposive sampling to select my sample frame. In this way, a researcher chooses the sample based on who they think would be appropriate for the study. Sarantakos (1998: 152) describes purposive sampling as a technique where researchers "choose subjects who in their opinion are thought to be relevant to the research topic". Thus, I used my own judgment to judge participants suitability based on the levels of engagement that the participants showed during class discussions. I was however careful not to exclude those students who were not extroverts and thus used the quality (and not necessarily quantity) of their verbal content as a marker. Sarantakos notes that purposive sampling, amongst other sampling techniques like non-probability, snowball and theoretical sampling, correspond to the inherent philosophy of qualitative research. This

is because they are "less structured, less quantitative and less strict than the techniques quantitative researchers employ" (ibid: 154).

4.3 Data Collection Methods and Analysis

As my data collection tool, I utilised face-to-face, in-depth interviewing. Bilton *et al.* (1996: 117) notes that the use of face-to-face interviews can provide a richer data based because the researcher can "clarify meaning, can probe for additional information on an unexpected issue that emerges during interviews, and can ensure that all the dimensions of the research are properly covered". A list of structured questions (see Appendix 2 and 3) that had been prepared in advance acted as a guide. Probing questions, which were formulated during the actual interviews, were used to elaborate on points made during actual interview sessions. The questions that were utilised took on open-ended formats that were semi-structured. The obvious advantage of this method was that it was easier to ask for clarification of responses from participants as it was easy to probe for additional information or unexpected issues that emerged during the interview session. It is also useful where there are too many potential answer categories as it allows participants more opportunity for creativity or self-expression (Sarantakos, 1998: 181).

All the interviews were conducted in English and ensuing discussions were captured through tape recording, transcribed and used to examine and analyse thematic constructs that were identified. Though the discussion was recorded by use of a tape recorder, so as to retain confidentiality, all participants requested the use of pseudonyms. It was for this reason that the consent forms were only signed and dated by the participants and no actual names given. The standardised research instrument that was recorded provided richer insight and was somewhat easier to consult during the data analysis stage.

Interviews were conducted in the study rooms at the Gender Studies department on campus, as this suited the respondent's convenience. All sessions were carried out on a one-on-one basis so as to ensure total privacy and confidentiality. On average, most of the interviews took between one and a half to two hours to complete. So as not to loose the flow of the interview and momentum gathered in the thought process, all interviews were carried out in one sitting.

Data obtained from this study was mainly qualitative in nature. As feminist research highlights the necessity of amplifying the 'people's voice' and underscoring their

participation as active agents, I utilised the narratives and meanings approach for analysing my data. Punch (2005: 217) extols this technique as an advantageous way of studying lives and lived experiences saying: "Contemporary anthropology and feminism often emphasise the study of lives from the narrator's viewpoint, with data seen as a shared production with the researcher". I therefore used verbatim wording from the participants coupled with my interpretations grounded in the theoretical framework used in chapter 3 that deemed gendered identities as being a factor of social constructs. Indents called attention to quotations from participants. These were reported in verbatim.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

While all the necessary precautions were undertaken to ensure the completeness of this study, some gaps still cropped up. An inescapable constraint of one-on-one interviews is that the data produced by interviews are social constructs, created by the self representation of the respondent and whatever interactional cues have been given off by the interviewer about the acceptability or otherwise of the accounts being presented (Dingwall and Miler, 1997: 59). This was despite trying to remain as impartial as possible. One way to beat this was to maintain a passive facial expression but at the same time, offer encouraging nods to show that the interviewer is listening and not offer subjective comments during the interview. This is not to be confused with probing for more information. Also as a woman entering a man's personal space and hoping to interact in a personal manner required that I build up a lot of trust with the participants.

4.5 Research Ethics

As all social research will invariably involve ethical issues, it is important to pay attention to moral guidelines concerned with research. The anticipated collection of data from human participants necessitates this consideration. Punch (ibid) lists key recurring themes applied in feminist research practices as responsibility and accountability by the researcher, confidentiality, questions of intention underlying research, and the idea that consent may need to be ongoing and renegotiated throughout the research project. As such, participants involved in this particular study did give their informed consent before any interviews began, after an explanation of the objectives of the survey had being given and they had firstly read and signed a consent form (see Appendix 1 for example). A copy of the signed consent form was given to each of the participants for their records.

The respondents were also given a choice of either having their interviews recorded or not. It was stressed that participants were free to drop out of the research at any time if they felt uncomfortable. In addition, clearance was first obtained from the Ethics Committee at UKZN before the research process commenced. Pseudonyms are used for each of the participants other than one Indian male participant who elected to use his real name.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter gives analysis gleaned from the data from interviews carried out with the research participants. It draws on thematic ideas voiced by the participants and reported in verbatim. The themes are however juxtaposed against the theoretical framework used in the study that views gender identities as a social construct. The first theme will discuss various cultural dictates that construct hegemonic identities and interrogate if males are perpetuating these or finding alternative discourses to express their contemporary identities. The very idea of a contemporary masculine identity is then discussed in the second section that explores if men are interrogating stereotypical identities and forging novel ways of enacting their identities. But firstly, the age demographics of my participants are profiled below.

5.2 Age Demographics

The ages of the participants does not vary greatly as most are in their 20's and are undergraduate students at UKZN's Howard College campus. All the participants are taking various degrees and the Introduction to gender studies module is taken as an elective. The participant's degree choices ranged from Law, Community Development, Psychology, Criminology, Psychology, Anthropology, and a Bachelor of Social Sciences (general degree). Let me mention that the range of degrees was not used a variable nor as a measure of how these differing degrees affected their masculine identities. It was felt that taking such an analysis into account would have been beyond the scope of this study due to the way the gendered identities become mediated by the different degrees. The table below thus shows the age and racial profiles of both the male and female participants. All the three racial categories consisted of three participants each. Thus, there were eighteen participants in all.

Table 1: Ages of participants

Race ⟶	Black			Indian			White		
Age of male participants	22	23	28	21	21	23	21	22	23
Age of female participants	20	24 (x2)	-	22	23	-	20	21 (x2)	-

5.3 Masculine Identities Upheld by Cultural Discourses

Cultural and Traditional Constructs

Social constructs that make up gendered identities, be they masculine or feminine, are said to be mostly centred on deeply held cultural and traditional beliefs. Gender identities and gender relations are essential facets of culture as they determine the way daily life is lived not only within the family, but also in society as a whole (UNDP, N.d: 6). But culture or tradition for that matter, on its own may not be inherently negative if viewed as the total way of life of a society. It is the proscribed learnt behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, values and ideals that may have either positive or negative consequences on either of the two genders. The in-depth interviews carried out revealed a range of emotions from total belief in one's culture, some level of introspection and engagement with it to a total disbelief in some. Other participants took to questioning some of the traditional rites members of their tribal groupings practiced and to some degree apportioned gender roles accompanying them while others had doubt in some but did not have the courage to publicly voice those doubts. The latter thus begrudgingly partook in the rites as expected. I will first discuss those that had a firm belief in their culture followed by those who were half-hearted and those who opposed it and the implications for these men's gender identities.

Amongst the three black male participants, culture was very central to their lives. This was specifically to do with attendant traditional rites dealing with death, thanksgiving or various life circumstances. Thembani, Khumalo and Dumisani attest to this saying:

> **Thembani**: I would say that I'm a strong believer in traditional values. As an individual, I am proud of my culture. And I do believe in those things and want to practice them but with a purpose, with a reason behind it. I don't want to do it [just] because it is supposed to be done.
>
> **Dumisani:** Zulu identity is important in the sense that as a human being, if you don't have or are not proud of your history or background, you're like a cow without horns ... because that is where you get your inspiration from.
>
> **Khumalo**: My cultural values are very important to me because everything at home is about culture. The way we were brought up, it's about culture.

The importance pegged to one's belief in culture becomes significant to gendered identities due to set expectations it pre-empts. Makahye (2005: 313) concurs that "society expects men and women to behave in a particular manner based on the prevalent beliefs, practices and norms of that society". These expectations are learnt anywhere from the family (both nuclear and extended), school, church and other institutions and consequently enforced. These expectations continue to define, order and cement acceptable behaviour for both men and women. Feminists have a bone to pick with cultural traditions which render more often

than not, negative expectations for men e.g. domineering, authoritative, definitive providers of the family, violent etc. while women are expected to be meek and submissive.

Young boys thus draw their ideas of what an ideal man is as per where they are culturally and geographically located. Men's constructions of masculine power may furthermore be modelled on actual rites they see their fathers, uncles, grandfathers and older male relatives performing which are ranked up high in the ladder as opposed to women's roles. Thembani explains how his participatory role in the actual rites carried out by his family grew and implications thereof:

> **Thembani**: Well, when I was young, I didn't participate much in them because I was regarded as being young so all I did was collect firewood. I definitely [said with emphasis] participate now more. I do the slaughtering and everything that is expected to be done. But it is with male elders because what happens is; there is a separation of chores because males will focus on slaughtering and saying the prayers.

For Thembani, there was a definite unconcealed pride in being able to finally participate in the physicality of the ritual. During the interview, he placed an emphasis on the word 'definitely' whilst acknowledging that he certainly and most definitely is more pro-active in the rituals now that he is an adult. The obvious pride he feels as a marker of being a man and of having come of age is rewarded with being able to assist the male elders. For Khumalo, the ability to participate in the actual slaughtering for the rites ceremony asserts his masculine identity and the fact that he has finally come of age. When I asked him how it felt, he said: "You feel like a grown man. Like you are not a boy anymore". When I asked Thembani where the women were during the actual slaughtering, his response was:

> **Thembani:** So in most cases, women focus mostly on the kitchen stuff like cooking, serving, cleaning the house. Males will focus on the killings and chanting the prayers.

Huge importance is paid to the actual ceremony that includes the slaughter of the animal and the chanting of prayers. So whilst cooking may be seen as an important function to any ceremony, it comes in a distant second. The importance given to the former activities are transferred to the person/people doing it and they thus become equated to the task at hand. This is seen again in the order of serving the food where Thembani attests that they would have "older males and then younger males".

These young boys are thus groomed into claiming a dominant position in society by virtue of the roles and tasks lain out for them. Thus, masculine identities that may be authoritarian

are upheld by discourses of cultural and traditional constructs. There are times however that these young boys do not have to necessarily claim that dominant position but it may happen in a covert way. As older generations die out, then the responsibility falls on younger men. When I asked Thembani of how he knew he was supposed to take part in the ceremonies, he said: "I realised that certain things – chores, responsibilities - that are handed down to us by the others because we are expected to take part in whatever needs to be done". These expectations to perform as required may not be initially verbalised at first due to the assumption that it is a way of life. The pressures may be felt by viewing other boys in one's age group carry out a function and thus the need for one to also get involved.

Though I have brought to attention the cultural constructs that paint the canvass for prescribed masculine identities, this should not be construed to mean that all black South African traditional cultures, and specifically Zulu culture, are cut from the same cloth. It was by coincidence rather than design that all three black participants happened to be Zulu. Given that UKZN is situated in the heartland of KwaZulu-Natal province which is home to Zulu's, this may be a reason. Thembani though is half Zulu and half Sotho but tends to follow Zulu culture much more because his parents are divorced. His father is Sotho while his mother is Zulu and he lives with the latter.

Willams, 1977 (cited in Sideris, 2004: 89) notes that: "The influence of dominant beliefs, meanings and values derives from the ways in which they organise and pattern people's lives, emotional and bodily selves, as lived systems of meanings and values". There are thus complex structures of power at play within cultural and traditional dictates that mediate gendered identities. The justification and emotional investment may be dictated by elder family members as seen in Thembani's case for example. However, other than the gendered socialisation processes that these young men undergo, conformity is necessitated by a need to belong. Sideris (ibid) concurs saying that men are more often than not motivated by a wish to resolve their sense of identity and belonging, and thus act on traditions that articulate those values and in that way confirm hierarchical gender relations.

Interrogating Culture: Room for Change?

An interesting and positive find emerged from discussions with the black participants on the totality of their belief in cultural traditions and rites. They revealed that though they believe in and participated in their cultural rites, they also from time to time question why

some traditions are practised. This introspection for me proved to be a paradox at first but was gradually explained by one of the participants who said:

> **Thembani:** I'd say that I'm somewhere in between being a cultural and modern person, for the simple fact that I don't want to loose my culture and I'm also living at a time where we have a common culture where we share the same activities and the kind of lifestyle that we live in now.

Thembani talks of what the crux of this dissertation is: contemporary masculine identities. On the periphery, this dissertation is interrogating the transformation of masculinities within the gendered discourse and asks, if given the foregoing, whether men are indeed reconstructing their gendered identities in contemporary times. Giddens, 1999 (cited in Sideris, 2004: 89) notes that in the sphere of domestic relationships, the tension that is set up when changing patterns of power require new ways of relating is frequently expressed as a struggle between tradition and modernity. Though the participants do have a strong belief in their culture as attested to in the preceding section, some are beginning to pro-actively engage with various expectations that are gender blind. For me, a deeper introspection into some cultural beliefs as Dumisani does when he questions some gender insensitive traditions is a pointer to that. Dumisani acknowledges that:

> **Dumisani:** I understand that there are some aspects of our Zulu traditions which really insult women for example women in the house most of the time would do heavy duty work more than men who should do nothing but just relax. That happened because of the culture.

From Thembani's quote, it would seem that (some) men may be undergoing a process through which they assess if they themselves have been complicit in engaging in gender unequal activities by virtue of how their masculine identities play out. In feminist circles, this type of engagement would be most welcome if followed by visible change. This constructive engagement has been wrought on by changes in lifestyle and culture and an adoption to a more modern or contemporary outlook on life. Most of these participants acknowledged the fact that they live in a cosmopolitan, more urbane environment has had a change on their outlook. The chance to get an education in an institution of higher learning may have necessitated the change in other instances. Certainly for Khumalo whose home is in a rural part of KwaZulu-Natal, the change during the school term to urban Durban where UKZN is located has had a visible impact on his worldview. He attests to this saying:

> **Khumalo:** Yeah, I think it has changed. I don't see women as negatively as I used to when I was still in the rural areas because at home we were given different roles.

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Khumalo further acknowledged that coming to an institution with an equal number, if not higher number of female versus male students made him aware of the fact that the essentialised and/or constructed differences between men and women were fickle. A more direct pointer to this was that more and more female students were taking science-based subjects that had traditionally been viewed as a male domain. Vincent (2006) speaks of a new and emerging version of masculinity which she terms as "rational-intellect masculinity". She however views this version as a marginalised and restricted identity pegged down to black male students at institutions of higher learning in the wake of post-apartheid South Africa. This is in light of differences and clashes they face with white students against the back drop of a highly hegemonic environment. For all the hardships encountered during racial integration, I would however notice a light at the end of the tunnel and borrow a leaf from Vincent's analysis of the emergent masculine identities at South African universities. This stems from Khumalo and other participants acknowledgements of university offering a novel and refreshing outlook of their identities that is changing in light of their experiences of interacting with various personalities across the genders and races. Perhaps it is a pointer of formal education making men more amenable to change or at the very least; it makes men more open to critically exploring different and divergent forms of their masculine identities and hence the rational-intellect masculinity.

After undertaking the introduction to gender studies module, a closer introspection of what the participants' responses mean for gender equity is necessary. Benton (1981: 181) is of the thought that encouraging men to change their perception of what constitutes their self-interests is to be involved in the reconstruction of their social and personal identities. At the very minimum it is hoped that the students who undergo the course redefine their relationships with the opposite gender. Nevertheless, the participants take cognizance of the fact that cultural dictates and social conditioning still hold sway in their lives. The psychological processes of conditioning, imitation and self-definition through which children are taught to internalise respective gendered roles and identities come to bear.

There may be some antagonism with the different and equitable way of thinking that the consciousness-raising gender module intends for and long held cultural beliefs. It may appear that the introspection depicted in the participants questioning some of their cultural beliefs may be half-hearted. Babbitt (1993: 256) opines that "understanding the experiences of an oppressed group does not appear to be sufficient, unless it involves some kind of transformation experience, particularly of the sort that results in the unsettling of the person's

self and position". From discussions with the participants, it would seem that a positive impact of the module is that at the very least, they were willing to engage with the subject material and some of the ways they themselves have perpetuated gender inequalities either consciously or unconsciously. Though the impact may not be as drastic, it in my opinion gives a window of opportunity in which actors in the feminist movement can engage with young men. Other than culture, peer pressure plays a significant role in how these young men position and enact their identities.

Peer Pressure Culture

Peers are usually contemporaries of the same status or persons of nearly the same age. As discussed before, peers usually have the power to influence each other into doing certain acts or thinking in a certain way. It was interesting to realise that though the participants often showed overt signs in their speech of not been influenced by certain decisions that marked their identity, they were blind to how covert markers worked. One of this was the effect of their peers' perceptions that ultimately shaped some of their actions. One participant who described himself as a "gender insensitive guy" describes a scenario that can be judged as being gender insensitive. He says:

> **Thembani:** My first residence [on campus] was in an all-boys floor and we used to cook and clean the dishes ourselves. And the second semester, I moved into a co-ed block. But when I got a girlfriend, I could not be seen to be cleaning the dishes and she was there. So she had to do that.
>
> **Edith:** Why was that?
>
> **Thembani:** Aaaa, [if not], I would have lost respect in front of the other guys.

Clearly, Thembani describes different identities for himself that suit the particular time and space he is in. Whilst from earlier conversations with him, one could judge him as been gender sensitive, this one particular comment is rather unnerving. But Thembani was simply succumbing to pressure wrought on him by trying to appear as assertive (if not manly) and in control of his relationship in front of his friends. The whole exercise was so that he can gain their respect. In this instance, his friends come to define how he should or should not behave,

The interesting factor however is that in the first instance when Thembani stayed in an all-boys floor, it was fine to be seen doing the cooking and cleaning when he was single. He did not have to prove anything. The fact that he (as other boys were) was doing his own cooking and cleaning up did not matter as much when he was single. But the co-ed block was a more public and visible sphere from which perhaps he felt that he had to prove his masculinity.

Fuller (2001) whilst speaking exclusively to gender constructions amongst Peruvian men, his observations on this virility, this manliness, can be juxtaposed against Thembani's observation. Fuller says that this is "something that every man must attain and requires responsibility, achievement in the outside space, and the recognition of one's spouse and peer group" (ibid: 319).

Another interesting observation that emerged from Thembani was the way in which though he and his girlfriend were acting out and interacting in the public sphere, that same interaction had elements of a domestic sphere. The domestic sphere that tended to accustom Thembani's girlfriend (and women in general) to a life of submissive servitude elevated Thembani to an authoritative position. Within the domestic sphere, whilst men then offer authority and direction, Fuller (ibid: 325) is of the thought that "the woman offers sexual favours and domestic servitude".

It was important to also to pay attention to the effect that peer groups have on my participants' identities. This is because of the hold peer groups have, especially on teenagers (both male and female) in terms of defining their tastes, likes and dislikes, decisions and personality. Some of these may be done in either overt or covert ways but the bottom line is for the need to be accepted by one's peer group. A question I posed to the participants asked which male and/or female figures they interacted with on a daily basis. Other than family members for those participants who stayed at home, most spoke of having friends on campus with whom they spoke to and saw on a daily basis.

One participant spoke of how boys in his secondary school encouraged him to get circumcised. To them circumcision was clearly a marker of the stage defining the change from childhood to adulthood. It was an overt sign of one's masculinity and a status symbol in terms of attaining respect given to one who has been circumcised among one's peers. One participant confesses that he even went to the extent of bragging about circumcision and encouraging other boys to have it done. He says: "I used to encourage guys to get circumcised. 'I promise you, it the best thing ever' I used to say. I used to say those things".

The participants view of circumcision other than being a sign and sometimes wrongly interpreted as a confirmation of one's masculine identity also carries with it some sexual connotations. The latter are misrepresentations that are passed on over time and may come to be misconstrued as a truth. One participant says:

Thembani: I grew up believing that … I was actually told by older boys … that if you are not circumcised, it is kind of like the banana, that you eat a banana without peeling it. So being circumcised is like you are having your banana already peeled so it is to your advantage.

When I expressly asked Thembani whether there were any sexual connotations in his statement, he replied with a laugh: "Of course. If they talk of peeling a banana, why would you eat a banana without peeling it? Like you enjoy sex more if you are circumcised". Thembani's reasoning for circumcision as been based on heightened sexual awareness points at the gradual loss of an integral understanding of what circumcision rites were meant for in a cultural and traditional sense. In most cases, they were usually markers of the attainment of a status: from childhood to adulthood. Thembani's friends have given it their own interpretations which may inadvertently have a pointer to their masculine identity. The latter is now based on sexual pleasure as understood by these young men. But because having sex is of itself an indicator that one has come of age, the ability to glean sexual pleasure and satisfaction may be an indication of, or even boost to their masculine identity among their peers.

Societal Constructs: The Media

While we usually speak of culture in terms of a set of attitudes, beliefs, and values held by a people, various cultures such as pop culture may emerge out of the media. All the participants acquiesced to the fact that the media, especially television and magazines, have played a salient role in defining not only their masculine identities but also what is perceived as being the ideal identity type in the public sphere. A few discussions around this suggested:

Edith: Are there any pressures for men to prove themselves as 'men' and where do these come from?

Thembani: Yeah, I'd say they come from the media because when I was growing up in the house, the person who was in control of the remote was the male. When the male had it, no one touched it. In most cases we would watch things and movies with violence. Actually growing up, I did not know anything else other than action movies up until I was 16 or so. We used to watch Rambo and such and he used to get the girl all the time so he was my kind of super star.

Patel: A lot comes from the media. Look at the magazines like Men's Health[11]. Every time you look at the cover, what does it support? Big bodies – a stereotype you have got to fit in.

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[11] Men's Health is a lifestyle magazine for men. In its September 2000 edition, it describes itself as "providing focused penetration directly at the affluent, male market, delivering sophisticated, upscale males to discerning advertisers".

Action figures like American actor Sylvester Stallone (whose on-screen character is known as Rambo) become the ultimate indicator of manly strength. Thembani's addition that Rambo always got the girl certainly gives one incentive to hold him on a pedestal and try to acquire his looks and personality. The macho, masculine and domineering image is one that is portrayed by most action movie heroes. It feeds into its (male) viewers psyche as the endeavoured and natural norm.

For Patel, one of the Indian participants, the magazine Men's Health provides that avenue for what an ideal male is. Patel focuses on bodily integrity as is projected on the magazine covers. Bodies it would seem are never a-political or asocial, but are always contested. In this case, there is a correlation between one's physical body image and the measure of how manly one is. However, Patel laments that this ideal flashed on the magazine cover is not achieved by everyone. He asks: "They have got this gorgeous man on the cover and do we see people like that on campus? Are these everyday people we associate with?" Patel seems to be on the right track and is questioning the hegemonic male identity illustrated in the magazine. Stibbe (2004: 33) nevertheless cautions that "hegemonic masculinity is produced through discourses that make it seem natural, inevitable and morally right that men behave in particular ways".

Complicit Women

Whilst the focus of my research was on men, I conducted interviews with female students so as to get a rough idea of what they think of contemporary masculine identities. Buchbinder (1994: 35) notes that although it is other men who confirm a man's masculinity upon him, women might affirm it. These may include a man's mother, sisters, aunts, female friends, or female sexual partner(s). The question of complicit women also sought to gauge what females themselves think of the ideal man. I will clarify that descriptions of the 'ideal man' are very subjective and vary from individual to individual. I thus picked on emerging themes that seemed to appear across the board as recurring and those that were very similar. Most of the males these female students interacted with on a day to day basis included their fathers (or step fathers for some), brothers, cousins and male friends on campus.

The need to interview the female students was propelled by the fact that sometimes women become complicit in dictating men's identities. I will thus be identifying ways in which women play a role in dictating men's identities. I will thus be identifying ways in which women play a role in men reproducing and enhancing, rejecting or changing popular

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versions of masculinity. Nonhlanhla who is Zulu says that her idea of a real man is someone who commands respect. She says:

> **Nonhlanhla:** The guy must be strong, dominant. Must have that sense of 'I am a man' that's like having that, in Zulu we call it *'isithunzi'* meaning having that sense of like when a man comes into a room, then his presence must be felt. So in Zulu, like we women stand up and recognise him, greet him and then sit down. But a man's presence must be felt, he must be strong. If he becomes one of those sensitive guys, they become too awkward to deal with but he must [also] have that physical side – be muscular, be like a man, macho, and tall as usual.

Nonhlanhla's idea of an ideal man is one who first and foremost commands respect. Her imaginative and descriptive imagery of women recognising a man's presence when he enters a room, to the extent that others stand and acknowledge him, was very telling. In her opinion, it is in the way that the man carried himself around that earned him respect. For her, the taller and muscular a man is, the easier it is for him to get more recognition. One then wonders what becomes of shorter, thinner, lanky males.

John who is a white Afrikaner seems to concur with Nonhlanhla when he says: "I suppose they (men) must have some degree of strength in order to protect themselves or whoever they want to protect". He also has the same inclinations as Nonhlanhla when he speaks of strength as been a vital element in a man's identity. Men may thus feel that they have to adhere to the ideal but in this case, the standard has been set by women.

But there is also another side of the coin that Priyadeshni and Andrea define. The two are in tune with a more contemporary, modern man who has a counter-hegemonic masculinity. They definitely both see male characteristics as defined as "strength but more strength of character and not physical" as Andrea said. Andrea who is currently in a relationship reveals that her boyfriend is not the typical macho male, authoritative-type. She however attributes this to the fact that maybe it was because he is currently in a long-term relationship. She says:

> **Andrea:** But if I am to compare him to a lot of his friends, they are not all that way, he really is a gem. He is special but that comes from being in a relationship.

For Priyadeshni, she sees the change espoused in her brother and attributes it to the fact that he spends so much time with her, her sisters and her mother. The speculation then may be that close and constant interaction with members of the opposite sex may make a men display less hegemonic qualities. In comparison to her father, Priyadeshni says of her brother who is the only male child in the family:

Priyadeshni: My brother is freer and open minded around females whereas my father is not as free and open around other females, even his own sisters. They do not communicate and he chooses his words when he is around them. My brother is not afraid to be emotional around us whereas my dad would hide it.

It would therefore seem that some men are receiving the benefits of less hegemonic relationships. According to Connell (2005: 1809), "... generational differences cross-cut the category 'men' spreading the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men".

5.4 Perceptions of Contemporary Culture

Although every society or grouping has particular cultural characteristics that are peculiar to them, there are certain smaller groupings that emerge and which are distinct from the overall culture. In sociological terms, this is referred to as a subculture. Kottak (2006: 217) describes a subculture as "commonly shared customs of a group within a [wider] society". Some of the participants described how especially in secondary schools, divisions arose in terms of cliques. Most of these were formed around the sporty types or those who were really clever and the rebellious types. Individuals therefore derived an identity from the association with these types of groups. The end result as one participant said is that it "kind of creates labels and categories of this is what you should be, this is what you are supposed to be".

John who is as Afrikaner describes the pressures he felt in secondary school to engage in sports because that was the stereotype typical of white Afrikaner male identity. He says:

> **John:** A big jock.[12] That is what an Afrikaner guy should be because you are Afrikaner and you are white and that is the way it should be and when you are not, it is like people look at you all funny like 'Why?'

John is caught up in a catch-22 situation where there is pressure to conform to a stereotype linked to his racial (and gender) grouping and his inherent dislike for sports. Pisani (2001: 166) concurs saying: "Rugby, with its macho image, was regarded by Afrikaner males as the 'king of sports'. Furthermore, the Springboks 1995 Rugby World Cup victory was interpreted as proof of the physical superiority of Afrikaner men". John revealed that he felt pressured to conform to the sporty type identity. He says:

> **Edith:** Where do these pressures come from?
>
> **John:** I think peer groups play a big part and I believe family as well because in a sense that especially if you have older brothers like I had an older brother and there was a lot of pressure

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[12] The Concise Oxford English Dictionary describes a jock as "an enthusiastic male athlete or sports fan".

ever since I was young and in school to start playing sports. And I did play sports eventually but I did not enjoy it and I thought to myself: I am not going to do something just because I was forced to do it.

Other than the sporting identity, there are also subcultures which emerge especially in secondary schools and may sometimes be maintained throughout life. These influences have staying power that may "open up spaces for resistance and for alternative versions of masculinity to thrive but at the same time offer extreme pressure for conformity" as Vincent (2006: 364) suggests. These subcultures are described variously by some of the male participants as nerds, geeks and the rebellious group. This sort of labelling identifies one as belonging to a certain group that has some inherent qualities. The nerds for example are usually clever students who may also be referred to as bookworms. Though they may have a high intelligence quotient, most are usually lacking in social skills. Some of the participants revealed that this labelling occurred due to differences caused by physical appearance or behaviour that was tied to what was stereotypically identified as been popular masculine identity. The participants said:

> **John:** Obviously there are still certain groups that people do not want to associate themselves with. Like the nerds or the geeks. Like in our school there was a table where the geeks sat and then other people sit there and other people here and the drinkers and the smokers and the rebels sit here so yeah…

When I asked some of the participants whether there was any pressure attached to the labelling and effort to belong to the politically correct group, some of them answered in the affirmative. One's image and identity as a man hinged on certain stereotypes. John's reasoning for (some) men's compliance is that "most people would rather be safe and secure and just to conform to the social expectations". Over and above the former is the realisation that these masculine identities are socially allocated through the labelling process. Epstein (1998: 53) acknowledges that identity formation "always takes place within socially given structures of power and social relations and always draws on the local cultural possibilities". The power relations are established between the various sub-cultural groupings i.e. nerds, jocks, the rebellious or the cool crowd and the hierarchical level each achieve.

There were however some participants, who though felt the pressure to succumb and belong to a certain group, did not do so. Their response is one of a neutral stance. To some extent, they are negotiating their identities and either consciously or unconsciously, distancing themselves from hegemonic identities. MacPhail, 2003 (cited in Blackbeard and

Lindegger, 2007: 28) acknowledges that peer groups may re-negotiate identities and can act as a powerful means for adolescent boys to create and maintain distances from dominant standards of masculinity. When I asked John, one of the participants, how he managed to ride the wave against conformity, he replied: "I guess I just hang in there". In John's case, he may not have consciously made an effort to circumvent the stereotypical identities but will have ultimately ended up with a masculine identity that is on the margins.

Other than the sub cultures, some participants explained that they are not bound to any overt traditional or cultural practices that would have an effect on their masculine identity. This may be viewed in contrast to overt traditional practices such as circumcision that in some cultures was a long drawn out process symbolising the accent to adulthood for a man. One participant who confessed to having been circumcised in a hospital, and whose operation was done as a surgical procedure, said that he did not feel any different afterwards. Other participants notably the white and Indian participants, and with the exception of the black Zulu participants, revealed that they had not been circumcised as it was not part of their culture. John who emphatically stated: "No, [I don't have any] cultural or traditional beliefs, and no, I'm not religious *per se*" then thinks that no culture defines his masculine identity. Vincent (2006: 364) however notes that "... various social institutions – school, university, sport, the media, and peers are involved in creating the conditions under which differing meanings of maleness compete for ascendancy". The participants who described the different subcultures – geeks, nerds, jocks etc. - may have missed out the fact that these may be contemporary yet contrasting sources that have come to define their masculine identity. Either belonging to one group or the other provides a range of sources from which they can now draw their identities.

Some participants also noted that they draw their identities from more urbane and cosmopolitan settings. Urbanisation and formal education may have an enabling effect on growing definitions of manhood and thus changing masculine identities. Khumalo acknowledged that the move from his rural KwaZulu-Natal home to Durban which has a more cosmopolitan feel, initiated a change in his perceptions. Barker and Ricardo (2006: 166) affirm that "cities may expose young men to more gender equitable versions of manhood, or force them to question male stereotypes". I however acknowledge that this exposure to cities may not always have a positive effect on men (and women). But for Khumalo it is not that he did not have a culture *per se*, but he has acquired a new culture, given that culture is not static but adaptive. He says:

Khumalo: Well, I can say the only thing that changed me was to come here to this institution …because I was just like the others in my society [where] there are a lot of stereotypes.

Edith: What changes did it have?

Khumalo: It makes me see that there is no such thing as being more dominant than the other and that made me see that women are equal to men.

5.5 Measures of Masculine Identity

Identity as Hall (1996) argues is something that we have to work at, something which is never complete, but always in a process. This implies that our identities may be malleable and can, and do change depending on the circumstances we find ourselves in and the social/cultural constructs they are subjected to. From the interviews held with the male participants, some identities are formed because it is what is expected given overt or covert pressures faced or the milieu in which one is situated. Sometimes, expectations are put on men to behave in certain ways. In this way, identities may be constructed from physical gender attributes attached to them. The participants exhibited signs of either conceding to, negotiating with, or contesting certain set markers of masculine identity.

Another realisation was that indeed, masculinities are never constant but always in a state of flux given their fluidity and adaptability. The male participants' identities have thus shifted over time concomitant with growth patterns in terms of age and also self-awareness. But in order for this negotiation to happen, there were certain measures of what an "ideal" man was that they often set themselves up against either consciously or unconsciously. I will therefore discuss sexuality, and physical attributes as examples of some measures of masculinity as voiced by the participants.

Sexuality

Given the rise in homophobic episodes that may be violent often times, sexual identity has come to be an important indicator and identifier of masculinity. A distinctive heteronormativity is positioned against homosexuality. Markers of ideal and idolised men over the years have portrayed men who are able to attract females. Lundgren, 1999 (cited in Barker and Ricardo, 2006: 168) notes that the status a sexually active young man attains among his peers can be more important than the intimacy that comes from the sexual relationship itself. All the male participants in this study acquiesced to the fact that their sexuality was a marker of their masculine identity in one way or another. There were also indicators that peer groups sometimes set up standards for sexual identity markers.

Blackbeard and Lindegger (2007: 35) both concur that "male peer groups are a central context for the construction of masculine identities against a standard of 'acceptability'. Thembani's disclosure as a 'ladies-man' given an indication of how he proves his sexual identity to his friends and how the ensuing praise he gets affirms the former.

> **Thembani:** I try by all means to have one female[13] but I cannot help to look at other females. And where I come from, people will tell you that I'm kind of a player because *eish*, I love women! Most of it comes naturally. If I see a woman and she is appealing to me and attractive, I will not be quiet about it, I'm going to say it. But it is a normal type of talk amongst guys because guys will talk about women the whole day and night. And it is to prove a point ... because the more you talk about girls, they say: 'Aah, he is the man!'

Thembani talks about the recognition his friends give him by vocalising that he is their ideal kind of man. Though Thembani professed not to be homophobic at all, this kind of overt recognition to his heterosexual status may in a way create standards for inclusion and exclusion into male peer groups. Barker 2000b (cited in Barker and Ricardo, 2006: 169) notes that this pattern of sexual bravado as a means of peer acceptance often continues into manhood. During the interview process, Thembani said the words: "Aah, he is the man" with such pride and a smile on his face, in reference to the praise from his friends for being a ladies-man. It was obvious that his heterosexuality, with a proven record, was of pride to him.

For other participants, when I asked them what indicators other than sexual qualities gave an indication of their masculinity, they gave having a girlfriend as one of them. Others were the ability to drive a car, coming home late without being questioned and the ability to make independent decisions without parental consent or consultation. For those participants who did not subscribe to any overt cultural/traditional dictates that marked the transition from adolescence to adulthood, having a girlfriend became an alternate indicator. In some cases having a girlfriend had an assumed appendage of having sex which was itself a measure of one's sexual identity. In this regard, some comments made were:

> **Khumalo:** If I can make an example, like having a girlfriend. If I'm a certain age like 20 years, so now they allow me to come home with my girlfriend. They may even ask or encourage me. Like my father used to ask me: Do you have a girlfriend? So they ask those kinds of questions. So then if you are allowed to come home with your girlfriend, it shows you are grown.

> **Kurshelen:** They become men once they are over the age of 18 and they start driving and they have girlfriends...

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[13] 'Female' in this instance, as vocalised by the participant, refers to his girlfriend.

Norms of one's sexual virility was confirmed by having a girlfriend. Khumalo's fathers' question about whether he has a girlfriend yet pre-supposes a heteronormative distinction that is privileged. Nevertheless, on the other end of the spectrum were some participants who acknowledged their homosexual identity. The two participants who are homosexual spoke of undergoing both vocal and physical abuse in secondary school due to their sexual identity. When I asked John if he got any adversely negative reactions from across the genders, he said: "generally it is males who frown upon us". Both participants noted that they had not told their parents the truth about their sexuality. Patel talks of having to change his identity and modify his behaviour in order to hide his true sexual status and fit into the heterosexual billing. He says:

> **Patel:** I was pressured into the gruff talk and talk like that. (He mimics a rough and grinding voice). I actually used to stand in front of the mirror and change my voice and I never used to be this way.

The homosexual participants therefore go through a trying process through which they try to negotiate and validate their masculine identity and status. Blackbeard and Lindegger (2007: 39) nevertheless also see homophobia as more than just reactionary but a process of making, managing and maintaining the boundaries of 'acceptable' masculinity. The latter has been socially constructed as the normative, idealised and correct way of 'doing' masculinity. Homosexual men however continue to live their lives on the periphery. Connell (1995: 81) describes such identities as marginalised and adds that they "are always relative to the authorisation of the hegemonic masculinity". When I asked John what treatment he got from other men when they found out about his sexual status, he said: "generally they frown on us". John who was in an-all boys' secondary school says that if one did not conform to stereotypical male behaviour "they would automatically label you weird or gay". The latter was given even without ascertaining if one was indeed homosexual. Blackbeard and Lindegger (2007: 40) note that such terms or labels "served to disempower threatening ambivalences through projections of shame and powerlessness". One of the participants who described himself severally as not been homophobic describes the anger he feels when propositioned by a homosexual.

> **Thembani:** I am not against gay guys ... but the thing I hate about gay guys is that they go for guys like us.
>
> **Edith:** What do you mean by "guys like us"?

Thembani: You know guys who are straight and they do not have a chance with. Guys whom you find sitting down and talking about girls. It is not that they challenge us but it is the thought that he thinks I have the potential to be gay. It is disrespectful.

Whilst Thembani may not interrogate his irritation with homosexual men, Buchbinder (1994: 63) notes that "… this view perceives homosexuality as deliberately and mischievously setting out to corrupt and distort the sexual values as well as the practices of the society". Inadvertently in this way, heterosexual men continue to normalise heterosexuality whilst (un)consciously judging homosexuality as being of a lesser standard. The catch is that there are no vocalised anti-homosexual sentiments as such which makes it harder to determine true levels of homosexual acceptability. Nevertheless gay men and homosexuality has if nothing else, politicised sexuality, sexual preference and identity formulation amongst men. Carrigan *et al.* (2002: 99) agree that "…gay liberation politics has continued to call into question the unconventional understanding of what it is to be a man".

Physical Measures

One of the overt indicators of masculine identity is usually tied to physical outlook. Some confirmed stereotypical features that identify and to some extent confirm one's male identity include: a macho physique, tall, broad shoulders, having a beard for some, muscular, and display feat of physical strength among many others. Those men who fall short of the measure either face ridicule or feelings of inadequacy. The lack of height and macho build were seen as key identifiers by most of the participants who said:

Thenbani: You need to be strong especially in this society today where you have got to have that respect. When I was growing up I wished to be tall because you cannot command that respect if you are short. You have got to be macho and tall. The physical outlook – there is no such thing as cute in males. I want to have that physical appearance whereby other guys cannot mess with you. Sort of like an ugly dude.

Khumalo: Sometimes I do want to be tall because like in terms of courtship, you try to propose and someone just says: 'No, I need a tall guy not one shorter than me'. You know sometimes I feel ashamed of my height but I have had to console myself that no one will make me feel less than I am.

For some participants like Kurshelen who is tall and has broad shoulders, he acknowledges the privilege that comes with already been the confirmed ideal/ he says:

> **Kurshelen:** Because I am well built and probably broader, it (the pressure to conform) would not have affected me as much as it would have affected a person who is thin, shorter and who has no feminine characteristics.

In describing the qualities that are less desirable, Kurshelen acknowledges that first and foremost, there is indeed an ideal physical quality that (some) men aspire to have. Though it may not often be vocalised, it is acknowledged. This type of thinking is in line with Connell's (1995) impressions of true masculinity being thought of as proceeding from men's bodies or at the very least expressed through the physicality.

It is not only men who are aware of an ideal physical body image that gives status, women too buy into it and the male participants acknowledged this. It may also invariably act as a covert form of pressure to try and attain that ideal. When I asked the female participants what ideal physical qualities they would like in a man, a few responded:

> **Nonhlanhla:** The guy must be strong and dominant. He must have that physical side – be muscular, be like a man, macho, and tall as usual. There is nothing wrong with short men but most women would prefer tall men. You must be at least taller than me.

> **Priyadeshni:** Can we sum it up one word – Will Smith! Tall, muscular, handsome …

The male participants acknowledged that they feel these pressures from women and sometimes try to act on them and change their physique by going to the gym. One said:

> **Khumalo:** I did go to the gym like when I was doing standard 8 and 9. I was busy going to the gym all day.

5.6 Perceptions of Parental Influence
Father – Son Relationships

Other than cultural or traditional socialisation processes, men also draw upon images of their identities from kinship relationships. These are experiential relations forged from male figures especially fathers, grandfathers, uncles or older siblings. Hyslop (2001: 142) notes this all too important bond saying: "Much discussion of male childhood becomes fixed on the relationship with the father. Even when the father is absent it seems to be assumed that his role in male socialisation is all-important". Through the socialisation process, young men learn acceptable male behaviour and standards by which they measure. As the family is the first unit within which we learn to function in the wider society, fathers become important teachers. These male-male relationships would then either further concretise patriarchal tendencies or go against the grain and inculcate more responsible identities.

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I specifically asked the male participants to mention some male figures with whom they interacted with at the very least, on a day to day basis. Amongst those mentioned were fathers, brothers, uncles, male teachers and male friends on campus. I then asked the participants about the quality of their relationships with their fathers or male guardians and how the formers mind-sets and identity perception compared with their own to date. There was no doubt that these young men's fathers or male guardians have left an indelible mark and impact on their lives. This gives me the opportunity to access counter-portrayals of manhood and inevitably fatherhood. It was also an opportunity to find out if young men are interrogating the quality of the relationships with their fathers/male guardians and what implications it has on their own identity formation.

Out of all the nine male participants, only two spoke of having positive relationships with their fathers. One said that although his father was not an educated man, he both highly admired and respected him. Dumisani acknowledged the pivotal role his father had played in shaping the man he is today by encouraging him to further his education. Marco and Patel spoke of having cordial yet aloof relationships with their fathers. It means that though their fathers were physically present, they were emotionally unavailable to their sons. Fathers in this kind of scenario fall back on stereotypical images of men they themselves had been socialised into; that of provider and breadwinner to one's family. This perpetuated stereotypical images of men. Patel further feels that his sexual identity as a homosexual may have also contributed in him having an emotionally empty relationship with his father. They described their fathers as:

> **Patel:** He feels that he has to be a certain way, feels that he has to be the breadwinner. My older brothers as well. They think that way and just play into it.
>
> **Kurshelen:** I am from a very patriarchal family where my dad does not do dishes and cannot cook and my mum basically does all the exclusively female things and he, the exclusively male things not because he wants to but because he was taught like that.

In seeking to explore ways in which fathers can benefit from a positive experience of fatherhood in *'Men and Fatherhood in South Africa'* Morrell (2006) concedes that efforts should be made to question how fatherhood relates to the construction of masculinity. John whose parents divorced when he was young at first welcomed the sense of independence it brought but ultimately felt the pressures of trying to fend for himself at an early age. He says:

> **John:** So I had that independence [but] had to look after myself already and had to be the male figure in the house from an early age and I could take care of myself.
>
> **Edith:** Did you feel any pressures and how did that affect you masculine identity?

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John: At some point it did when I was working and staying with a friend but still had the financial responsibility so it got a bit too much for me when I felt that I was still so young, practically a child and now I have all the responsibility to worry about.

John who is only 21 years old felt that he had to mature at a faster rate than his contemporaries. He also says that he had to figure out most things on his own because he was different from his older brother who was the closest male role model he had. John who is a homosexual explains that he was not into sports and had a smaller body frame. He describes his brother as a "typical jock" who was into sports and "all things male". There is however hesitation on John's part to further discuss his father, a choice I respected.

One of the objectives of this study was to interrogate processes of change, if any, that male students viewed as motivation for change. Relationships with their fathers on how the latter's gendered identity were performed acted as a motivation for change. These participants encountered an autocratic heavily overbearing and sometimes violent identity in their fathers. Whilst this is in no way a blanket charge on all South African fathers, it nevertheless forms an avenue for linkages between parent – child socialisation and identity formation. Thembani and Khumalo's fathers were both polygamous men who while being physically present, did not have an emotional connection with their sons. They both say:

Thembani: When I was growing up, I wanted to be different from what my father was because he was very violent and with the fact that if you ever talked about a girl, he would talk about women been troublesome. Now I am like I want to be different and an opposite of my father with the fact that my mother raised me (sic). But as much as I try not to be like my father, I see now that I am sort of leaning towards that direction.

Khumalo: I think it is different because I can see the way I behave now and the way our fathers and uncles treated women ... and no, I would not want to be a polygamous man like my father because I have been there. I have seen that and there is no excitement about it.

The two male participants therefore take on a very antithetical view of the type of masculine identity exemplified by their fathers. Khumalo has gripes with polygamy whilst Thembani had to contend with a violent father. Both of these characteristics have markers of perpetual patriarchal systems that the young men are seeking to construct counter-hegemonic identities. Thembani however has the heart to concede that it is difficult to acquire a contrasting identity from his father as he had been socialised into that. Mothers however play a big role too in either changing their sons hegemonic identities or cementing them further.

Mother – Son Relationships

Lewis, 1991 (cited in Hyslop, 2001: 142) contends that the conceptions of masculinity carried by women who are mothers can be decisive for the social shaping of the boys they rear. Therefore in as much influence as fathers have on their sons, mothers too (and sisters by default) impact on their son's lives due to the time spent with them at infancy. From the discussions with the participants (especially noted in Khumalo and Thembani), an empathetic attitude was created for women. This was because of the way their fathers mistreated their mothers. Thembani notes:

> **Thembani:** When I was growing up before my father and my mother separated, my father used to beat up my mother and I witnessed that happening and it hurt me because of the fact that she is my mother … so I do believe that you are not supposed to hit girls and stuff like that.

For other participants, it was their fathers aloof and distant personality/identity that made them identify more with their mothers. They thus contend that the hard edged image that is stereotypically male is not one they aspire to. The participants talked of being aware of their sensitive side and been able to exhibit what was considered as unmanly behaviour. They however admit that there are still pressures especially from peer groups to act in a particular way. Paradoxically, Thembani also talks of pressures from women (and sometimes mothers) that make them complicit in strengthening stereotypical male identities. He alludes to the fact that though he can cook and look after himself, if he got married and continued doing those chores, his mother would probably ask: "What is wrong with you?" The question is a judgement on the veracity of his masculinity as head of the house. Thomas (2004) though doing research on Caribbean men's identities and women's complicity in its formation, notes that mothers who acted like Thembani's mother passed on the ideology to their daughters and thus entrenched the culture. The fact that women are the primary caregivers in the Caribbean emphasizes the role women play in producing these "swaggering" men raising their sons with this indulgent philosophy and creating expectations in their daughters that those are the normal codes of gendered behaviour (ibid).

5.7 Contemporary Gendered Representations

Interrogating contemporary gendered representations ultimately requires us to question if men are indeed changing perceptions of their identities. As discussed earlier, contemporary in this sense denotes the present time or a modern, current thought process. For the purposes of this research, indicators used to measure the participants contemporary gendered

representations included: examples of what constituted both physical and other inherent qualities of a man, behaviour difference between themselves and their older male relatives and what markers other than traditional or cultural values spelt out their masculine identity. Though these are very subjective indicators, the question was seeking to explore if the male participants were exploring new ways of enacting their identities other than the hegemonic dictate and if so, what these new ways were and why the change.

Most of the participants' interpretations of their own contemporary gendered identity proved to be a paradox. This was because most of them acknowledged the vices that go along with hegemonic masculinity as been negative. At that stage, they spoke critically about for example, having violent fathers and not wanting to identify with nor typify that kind of identity. The paradox would then set in when they would inadvertently slip into these hegemonic identities for example feeling pressured to let his girlfriend do the cooking and wash dishes as expressed by Thembani on occasions that he needed to assert his masculinity in front of his male counterparts. In this instance though, we note the fluidity of masculine identities that are in a constant state of flux as Australian gender scholar Bob Connell notes. We might then begin to question the force and contexts that determine and define masculine identities. This should be done in totality of one's whole environment and not exclusive to one occasion.

Nonetheless, though socialised within different contexts i.e. tradition/culture, peer groups, family, media etc. some participants shared different views of their identity. They saw themselves as been equal to women in all spheres while some took to questioning cultural rites and dictates that they would not follow blindly. Fernāndez-Balboa (1998: 132) hopes that this introspection would uncover the lies, secrets and silences that patriarchy has legitimised and perpetuated. John, one of the participants describes how his father could not handle the fact that his wife (John's mother) excelled at work and got promoted whilst he stayed stagnant in the same post. He continues to say:

> **John:** … He was brought up in a way that a man must be the breadwinner so with this happening, he felt demasculated and belittled and felt that he was not what he was supposed to be. Maybe for men in my generation it will not have to be an issue bit obviously not for my dad.
>
> **Edith:** So for you, what is your outlook on your masculine identity now?
>
> **John:** It is no issue for me that I do not look like what a typical male is supposed to look like and I do not care. I do not go to the gym and work myself to death and do sports etc. because

it is not necessary. Just because society says it has to be like that, it does not have to be like that.

Kenway (1998: 160) contends that indeed boys learn that there are different ways of being a male, some more powerful and valued than others, and that some subjects and situations are more suitable for 'real boys' than are others. During the interviews, participants identified various characteristics that are readily identified as dominant male identities. Some admitted to trying to fit the bill at various times by e.g. going to the gym to bulk up or playing sports that was deemed as necessary. But it would seem that the participants may be changing their perceptions to suit changing spatial and geographical arrangements. We can refer to what Australian gender scholar Bob Connell terms as 'gender regimes' to note what specific factors order certain changes. Kenway (ibid) notes that some changes might arise through boys' interaction with the changing dynamics of immediate situations and changing broader social structures. Some participants suggested:

Thembani: When you look at gender [inequality], you see those things happening. There was that separation at the school that I was attending in high school amongst boys and girls. And I always wanted to know is there any real difference between men and women besides the physical. If there is, it is not that much. It is probably driven by society and stuff.

Patel: There are instances at home where my father is the breadwinner and although my mother is not in the financial area, they respect each other … but there are times when my father will have the final say.

Kurshelen: I come from a very patriarchal family where my dad does not do dishes and cannot cook and my mum basically does all the exclusive female things and he does all the exclusive male things not because he wanted to but because he was taught like that. But for me definitely, it will be different because my house will be very open-minded … I would like an egalitarian family.

The above narratives brought to light some situations that are enabling the young men to interrogate their constructed gendered roles. They notice some of them at a very integral level: the family setting. So whilst they are confronted with patriarchal gender regimes at home, and in the public sphere, they also notice some changes. Khumalo elaborates on this:

Khumalo: [Before] I was just like the others because in my society, there are a lot of stereotypes. So I was like those guys, listening to them talk now, they are all taking about all those things and I was just like them. What changed me was to come to this institution.

Edith: What specifics at UKZN changed you?

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Khumalo: Seeing more female students on campus for one. It makes me see that there is not such a thing as being more dominant than the other and that made me see that women are as equal as men.

Edith: Are there times you still feel pressured to act in non-egalitarian ways though?

Khumalo: Of course yes sometimes due to pressure from friends.

Blackbeard and Lindegger (2007) explain that masculine identities are constituted through multiple and contradictory self-narratives which may unravel the paradox I sense. The latter is in relation to noticing gender inequalities and then perpetuating some of them, on either a conscious or unconscious level. This is therefore an indication that identities and meanings of masculinity are constructed, verified and regulated by social and unconscious processes, at an individual level and also in peer group contexts for example (Blackbeard and Lindegger, 2007: 43). These two South African psychologists however juxtapose this process of identity construction against the dialogical self theory. Proponents of this theory argue that persons give meaning to their relationships through an on-going dialogue taking place between different parts of the self, termed characters, voices or positions (Dimaggio *et al.* 2006).

5.8 Nexus between Theory and Practice

Given that the participants had undergone an introductory gender studies module, it was inevitable to analyse what impact the course had on their gendered identities. The supposition of a 'rational-intellectual masculinity' as forwarded by Vincent (2006) and gleaned from the findings suggest a process of "…contestation, accommodation, transgression and resistance over the construction of dominant norms of masculinity…" that the male students experience. This process may either be on a conscious or unconscious level. At the very least, the module hopes that students will examine the effects of hegemonic masculinity in the context of society and culture. In doing the former, it seeks to increase sensitivity to a broad range of issues at personal, interpersonal, institutional and community level by highlighting traditional and modern cultural assumptions about gender, and how they impact on both men and women.[14] It was therefore worthwhile to investigate whether the students made any connection between the theoretical discourse of contested gender relations and masculine identity and the practicalities of the way they themselves are socialised.

I asked the male participants why they had elected to take the module and if they then felt any different about the way they choose to enact their masculine identities in line with

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[14] The objective of the module was gleaned from the introductory gender studies course reader that is given to students taking the module (Pg. 3).

principles of gender parity. The participants talked of taking the module just because they had to choose an elective. However, Patel, one of the Indian participants, was driven by an interest spurred on by his core degree; Anthropology. In retrospect, it may have also being stimulated by the homophobic experience he endured for being homosexual. He says:

> **Patel:** Originally before gender studies, I did feel that men were forced to behave in a certain way. I was always up for women's rights and felt that their voices were not being heard enough.
>
> **Edythe:** Did you learn anything different from the module?
>
> **Patel:** I believe in who I am much more. I am happy to be a homosexual. Fair enough, to a certain extent, I have been forced sometimes to pretend [due to pressure] by my parents, and by people at school but I have learnt to deal with that.

It may seem that for Patel, the affirmation he found in the normalising of minority sexualities was very accommodating. Though this may have a biased attachment, it may be an avenue through which other men learn to accept attitudes and behaviours that have traditionally been labelled as feminine.

Indeed as Vincent (ibid: 365) points out, "individuals negotiate their identities in relation to practices and relationships informed by the range of gender models on offer". The participants related various factors that still determine their identities as seen above. I have pointed out a number of paradoxes that stand out especially within cultural traditional rites in which the black participants participated in. Though they acknowledged that some of the rites practices are indeed oppressive to women, they still choose to participate in some traditional activities whilst endorsing the importance of culture in their lives. This was partly due to the fact that culture does shape the bedrock of gendered identities and that the actual participation in attendant rites then become a marker of one's masculine identity, an accolade they aspire to. Jobson's (2005: 16) view that "gender and culture are both key aspects of the identity of an individual" come to bear.

We however establish Morrell's (2001: 7) assertion that "masculinities are fluid and should not be considered as belonging in a fixed way to any group of men" in some of the participants who may be choosing to engage in alternative ways of performing their gender. In the same way that we have indeed asserted the place of culture for instance, the media or peer pressure in influencing these young men's masculinities, the gender module can also be used to create and influence alternate ways of thinking that may be oppose hegemonic

prescriptions of exemplary or stereotypical masculinity. Epstein and Johnson (1998: 15) affirm that:

> Human agents cannot stand outside culture and wield power precisely as they wish. Power is always limited and shaped by systems of knowledge which also shape the subjects and objects of power. ...power/knowledge position us as subjects of particular kinds. They put pressure on us to adopt particular identities ... in this particular sense, power and knowledge as discourses 'constructs' social identities.

There are instances for example where the male participants have noted that the media especially through magazines and television shows prescribe a macho-type man as the marker of physical masculinity. There were of course initial pressures to conform to those standards by way of going to the gym to bulk up but these faded away.

There may be an expectation that these male participants by virtue of having attended the gender studies module would experience a paradigm shift in the way they articulate their gendered identities. Vincent (2006: 365) however notes that "the decision whether or not to undertake this process of learning is, of course, profoundly political". The sites at which these students live out their masculine identities are very powerful and hold varying complexities. These become dependant on whether one chooses to conform to and uphold stereotypical masculine identities and thereby privilege dominant hegemonic forms, or contest them and be sidelined to the margins.

Conclusion

This dissertation delved into the deconstruction of the male gender and therefore undercurrents accruing from changing masculine identities amongst a group of young men at UKZN's Howard College campus. It also sought to interrogate the transformative role of masculinities within the gender discourse and asked if given the foregoing, whether men are indeed reconstructing their gendered identities in contemporary times. The analysis from the research shows a paradox of sorts whereby on one level the young men are indeed consciously interrogating whether the masculine identities they exhibit are egalitarian. They also notice stereotypical behaviours and physical attributes that they as men are expected to have. Whilst some are privileged to have that particular physique, others are not so lucky and may then engage in various activities such as going to the gym in order to bulk up.

These young men are also noticing differences between the way they enact their masculine identities and say for example the way their older father, brothers or guardians act out. While

some have positive role models, for others having violent or misogynist fathers gave them the impetus to act differently. Due to socialisation processes and internalising behaviours by older role models, some of the young men however expressed the fear that they may slip into the same behaviour traits as their older role models.

There was also an indication that contemporary masculine identities can be depicted in a more egalitarian and gender equitable environment. If nothing else, urbanisation and formal education perhaps gives young men a chance to engage in critical reflection. The following chapter wraps up the discussions contained in the analysis and gives some recommendations on how the perspectives by the young men can be consolidated into positive gains in the search for gender equity.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research sought to interrogate contemporary masculine identities and in particular, those reflective of male students who had undertaken an introductory gender studies module at UKZN's Howard College campus. For me, the impetus to study masculinities within a gender studies ambit that is predominantly centred on women became necessary so as not to render men genderless. Men's histories and especially in South Africa has depicted men as being in a crisis, and of violent, dominant and authoritative men. Men have been erroneously depicted as one consolidated grouping with largely the same negative qualities. Whilst I am not dismissing the case of problematic masculinities, this study sought to investigate if men are indeed perpetuating negative qualities or charting new paths for themselves.

This study discussed various identities that are upheld by longstanding discourses of cultural, traditional and social constructs. The theoretical framework situated in social constructionism theory was used to uncover both overt and covert ways in which cultural practices are used to systematically indoctrinate gendered identities in men (as with women). Socialisation processes which mainly start in the family, program men into exhibiting certain qualities. Peer groups, the media etc. also act as enabling pressures. Another focus of this study was to involve young women and find out if they are implicated in the process of masculine identity formation and thus become complicit partners. In the same vein, there are men who benefit from the patriarchal dividend and thus become complicit in marginalising other men who may choose to enact their masculine identity differently. This was reflected in the homosexual participants who talked of harrowing experiences in the face of a normative heterosexual construct as being the ideal masculine sexual identity. The former would fall into what Australian gender scholar Bob Connell termed as marginalised masculinities. These men are still trying to find a niche for themselves despite the country's constitution offering them a legally binding legitimate place and the freedom to express themselves.

The impetus to further style the male students as having contemporary identities was vested in Morrell's (2001) assumption that masculine identities do change and are therefore not a fixed and essential identity which all men have. These identities were thus constructed as being fluid and in a constant state of flux. Buchbinder (1994) had however implored gender activists to be wary of making assumptions about men who may on an open and public level be seen to be interrogating their complicity in perpetuating gender inequalities just because they are taking a gender studies module. Further, there may be an assumption

that these men who are in an institution of higher learning may be more amenable to changing their gendered identities for the better. I therefore sought to explore if the male students were dispelling long standing stereotypical behaviour in the face of changing belief systems.

Changes envisioned in men have been juxtaposed against what Morrell (2001) terms as 'new man'. These are men who are crafting out masculine identities that are more egalitarian and in line with the ethos of gender equality. In exploring and evaluating contemporary gendered representations of masculine identities that UKZN male students draw upon, it was clear that not all of them subscribed to stereotypical ideas. This however does not mean that participants felt any of the pressures to succumb to hegemonic identities any lesser. In further scrutinising if there were other identities they felt they had to identify with, it emerged that cliques and labelling especially in secondary school and carried on in university were present. Labels such as been termed a nerd, a jock, a geek or one of the rebellious types were present.

Lastly, there was a need to interrogate the process of change if any, that the male students viewed as motivation for changing masculinities. Pro-men feminism theory which identifies and acknowledges (some) men as being pro-active change agents interrogated if indeed these male participants were changing. Some motivations for change included having violent fathers and the inherent need to distance oneself from that past, having more interactions with females in the family (i.e. mothers predominantly, girlfriends, sisters, aunts etc.) and on campus, the rural-urban divide and living a more cosmopolitan and urbane lifestyle and interactions with female students on campus among others.

Recommendations

Research into masculine identities should ultimately be juxtaposed against the need to establish a more egalitarian environment in the hope of achieving gender equality. This research although exploratory due to the small sample size, provides impetus from moving from mere rhetoric in terms of theory and into concrete practice. Efforts to attain gender equality in the past have focussed more on women as victims and men as perpetrators of these inequalities. In analysing the research findings in relation to the socialisation of boys, there were some young men who were questioning the status quo and growing inequalities. Barker (2006: 5) views such men as a winning strategy saying:

> It is precisely these 'cracks', inconsistencies or performances of
> resistance to traditional views about manhood that offer entry points for
> intervention. Such young men generally show a high degree of self-

reflection, some awareness of the personal benefits of embracing gender equality, and generally had others around them (family members, a valued peer or peer group, or an adult male who modelled gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours) who also questioned gender norms.

There is thus a need to pro-actively engage men in various gender equity programmes in order to reap multiple benefits.

There is also a need to further interrogate what constructs define masculine identity in contemporary times. The fluidity seen in masculine identities arises concomitantly with their changing constructs. The ways in which culture or traditional rites influenced men say twenty years ago may not be the same way these traditions influence young men now. One of the participants talked of having his circumcision done as a surgical operation in a hospital. With these on-going changes, it is worthy for gender practitioners to thus discover what other modern or novel ways influence men. If young men are challenging and questioning violent attitudes as seen in their fathers, there is need for interventions that target such men and show them a different way of 'doing' their masculine identities. This is very important in light of the fact that one participant confessed that though his fathers' attitude to women was questionable, he feared that he may be headed down the same route and therefore begin acting like him.

Programmatic elements of gender equity programmes need to therefore come up with healthy alternate role models for young boys. Schools and universities may be hot beds for imparting a critical awareness and gender sensitivity which is long standing. Most of the participants confessed that the introductory gender module would not have been a module of choice but in some cases it was part of their electives adjacent to their core programmes e.g. Law, Criminology etc. They however confessed that they were pleasantly surprised to learn and discover more about themselves and the place of men in securing an egalitarian society. To them, words bandied around gender equity had signalled a woman-only zone or male bashing forums. Modules such as the introductory gender studies module may if nothing else provide a space within which young men can exercise their own agency in charting out counter-hegemonic identities.

One of the aims of situating any research in an institution of higher learning was to also interrogate if both urbanisation and formal education make one more amenable to changing their gendered identities. Though Buchbinder (1994) warns us to be wary of making such

assumptions, some participants intimated that for them, moving from a rural background to Durban (where UKZN is situated) helped to lift of the veil of some cultural stereotypes. Barker and Ricardo (2006: 166) acknowledge that "urbanisation ... [and] formal schooling clearly impacts the social construction of masculinities, and is a space for creating or reinforcing specific versions of manhood". While the effects of urbanisation can indeed initiate and reinforce negative identities due to high incidences of poverty, unemployment or a change in lifestyle, the hope is for a rational man who is able to interrogate the negatives and the positives. A latent hope is that young men who are exposed to formal education systems can deconstruct gendered identities through critical reflection and thinking.

Nevertheless, whilst we speak positively about urbanisation and formal education, it is however a fact that the latter still contain nagging elements of socially and culturally constructed gendered identities that these young men may feel pressured to enforce. Acceptance into a peer group and pressures from normative elements may make some young men bow to following and living out a stereotypical masculine identity. Some participants talked of how older siblings mapped out how they would act and thus firmly position themselves as men. Another participant talked of how his older brother gave him advice to toughen up when we went to an all-boys secondary school so as to cement his position among other boys.

Analysis gleaned from this research therefore indicate that there are some factors that may make young men more amenable to changing gendered ideas about the roles of males and females. In the same vein, I do recognise that some factors are not easily adaptable and thus most gender programmes are usually monolithic in nature and target service delivery only. There is however a need for dual interventions in programmes that target young men in addressing gender equity and interrogate the gender socialisation of these men and the behaviour norms that influence identity formation.

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Appendix 1

Participant Consent Form

Title of Project
Renegotiating Masculinities: Perspectives of male students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

Researcher's pledge to participant
The researcher has explained the objectives and purpose of the data collection. It has been made clear to me that the information obtained will be used exclusively for academic purposes and no commercial gains will be accrued. It has also been made clear that all responses that I give will remain confidential and will not be traced back to me (the participant) in any way. I also have a choice as whether I want to use a pseudonym or not.

The intended benefits of the research
The researcher has explained to me that she will not get any commercial benefits from the information I will give. She has explained that the dissertation can however be used to further the work of activists within the Gender Studies environment by contributing to a growing pool of knowledge in the area.

Statement and consent to be read out to the participant
I agree to participate in the study that has been fully explained to me.
I understand that I have not been coerced into answering any questions and are doing so on my own free will. The researcher has promised to treat the information I will give to her with absolute confidentiality including not revealing my identity to anyone for whatever reason. I am also aware that this interview will be recorded and I have given my consent. It has been explained to me that I can withdraw from this research process at any time should I feel stressed, uncomfortable, or embarrassed by some of the questions or for any other reason.

Signature of participant: .... **Date:** ....

Signature of researcher................................... **Date:** ....

Researcher: Edith Shikumo
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Appendix 2
Question Guide
I. Male students
Part I

1. What is your age?

2. What racial group do you belong to?

3. What degree are you pursuing at UKZN?

4. The following questions will help give me some more background information
(a) Within your nuclear family structure, what is your numerical position?
(b) Do you currently stay on campus or in a rented room outside campus or at home with your parents/guardians?
© Name the various male figure(s) that you live with and interact with daily. What about female figures?

5. Do you subscribe to any particular cultural, traditional or religious values?
(b) If answered yes to the above, probe: What are these values?
© How important are the above mentioned values to your life? Please explain

6. Are there cultural, traditional or religious ceremonies you practice that mark the adolescent to adulthood stage?
(b) Did you participate in any of the above ceremonies?
© If so, what were your perceptions of your (gender) identity afterwards?

7. What qualities if any, do you think are important for one to be considered a man?
(b) Do you think you have those values? (Probe further for both those he thinks he has and those he does not)
© Would you like to have more of those values or not? Please explain which ones you would like to have and those you would not like.

8. What physical qualities do you think identify a person as a man?
(b) Is it important that every man has these qualities?
© If some of these qualities are lacking, are there any positive or negative implications?

9. Do you think that there are pressures on boys and men to show qualities that are viewed as exemplary of a man?
(b) If so, where do they come from? (Probe using: cultural/traditional dictates, parental dictates, friends/peers, media, campus environment, essentialised gender dictates etc.)

10. Do you believe and practice everything that is said to be 'manly behaviour' as set out by your culture or racial grouping?
Probe: Ask them to identify and explain which ones they practice and which ones they leave out and why so.

11. Do you think your behaviour as a man now is any different from or similar to that of your father/male guardian or older uncles, siblings etc.?
If yes, probe further for tangible examples.

12. Do you think that men are currently experiencing any issues that need special attention within the greater gender equity sphere?

Part II

(This set of questions were specific to the Gender Studies module taken)

1. Why did you choose to take the Gender Studies module? Was it by coercion, force or a matter of personal choice?

2. Do you think your perceptions of gender and gender equality have changed or remained the same? If there has been a change, please describe it to me.

(b) In addition, has there been any change to how to perceive your own masculine identity. If yes, please explain.

Appendix 3
II. Female students

1. What is your age?

2. What racial group do you belong to?

3. What degree are you pursuing at UKZN?

4. The following questions will help give me some more background information
(a) Within your nuclear family structure, what is your numerical position?
(b) Do you currently stay on campus or in a rented room outside campus or at home with your parents/guardians?
© Name the various male figure(s) that you live with and interact with daily. What about female figures?

5. What qualities do you think a man should have?

6. Do you notice any change in the way young men behave these days as opposed to say your father/male guardian or other older male relatives?
Probe: If yes, what changes have you noticed and if not, what has remained the same?

7. Can you identify any positive and/or negative attributes that men these days show. Explain why you think that they are negative or positive.

8. What changes, if any, would you like some of the men you encounter at least on a daily basis to undertake? Please give examples.

9. In terms of attaining gender equity, in what ways would you suggest that men get involved?