

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES: MALE UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS' TALK ABOUT WOMEN AND HETEROSEXUAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the talk of male Psychology students about women and heterosexual relationships in all-male discussion groups. Four vignettes depicting difficult situations in heterosexual relationships were used to initiate discussion. Eight men attending a historically black university participated in the group discussions, which were facilitated by a male postgraduate Psychology student. The study explored masculine identity construction by identifying interpretive repertoires deployed by respondents to construct and account for themselves and their social worlds, within the context of discussions about relationships with women. Three interpretive repertoires of masculinity: the male-as-breadwinner/provider, male-as-protector and the "New Man" repertoire were identified.

The complex and contradictory nature of masculine identity construction is highlighted. Drawing on the work of Hollway (1984), two discourses of heterosexuality were also identified: the have/hold discourse and the permissive discourse. The invocation of the "New Man" repertoire and pro-feminist discourses of heterosexuality in the men's talk may signify a move towards more enlightened and less oppressive constructions of masculinity, heterosexuality and gender.

Key Words: discourse analysis, masculinities, interpretive repertoires, gender identity, heterosexuality

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, literature on men and masculine identities has proliferated. Historically, the growing interest in men is a response to the feminist movement of the 1970s when, with enquiries into female subjectivity, questions arose about manhood and masculinity. It is now widely recognised that the struggle for gender equality needs to include men: gender issues are men's issues as well.

A number of approaches have been adopted in respect of masculinity. For example, Bly (1990) is critical of the feminist movement and felt that men were unjustly accused for the evils associated with patriarchy. Bly argues that men should not accept blame and that men should acknowledge and celebrate their differences from women. Seidler (1989) emphasizes the control of emotions and the denial of sexuality in the construction of masculinity, but locates masculinity as an aspect of large-scale social structures and processes. Kimmel (1987) examines the "crises of masculinity" over different historical periods. Segal (1990, cited in Robinson, 1996) emphasizes specific masculinities - for instance macho, black, gay and anti-sexist - to illustrate that the differences between men is fundamental to the struggle for change. She is critical of accounts of masculinity that reduce a consideration of male power (with its social, economic and political dimensions) solely to the intricate workings of the psyche.

The most influential theorist on masculinity is undoubtedly Robert Connell (1987, 1995, 2000), who provided the academic and social world

with a lucidly articulated theoretical base for the understanding of masculine identities. His approach sought to build on existing theories of male/masculine gender identity and can be located within the traditions of feminism, materialism and critical theory (Connell, 1995). Connell is critical of "sex-role" theory, which purports that male and female roles are determined by societal expectations and norms that define what is deemed appropriate behaviour for men and women. He argues that this theory underestimates personal agency and fails to adequately address issues of power. According to Connell (1987, 1995, 2000), the process of negotiating a masculine identity is not as simple as role theory suggests: the construction of masculinities is a complex process, marked by contradictions and conflicts.

In his seminal text, *Masculinities*, Connell (1995) outlines a typology of masculine identities based on life-history research done on a group of Australian men. He uses the terms 'subordinate', 'marginalized' and 'complicit' for these masculinities, with regard to how they were positioned in relation to the dominant masculinity, which Connell termed 'hegemonic' (borrowed from Gramsci). Hegemonic masculinity is the masculinity that is most desired or honoured (Connell, 1995, 2000). The hegemonic form need not be the most common or the most comfortable, and according to Connell (2000), most men live in a state of tension with or distance from the hegemonic masculinity of their culture and community. Within this framework-there are specific gender relations of subordination and dominance between men. For instance, homosexual men are subordinate to heterosexual men, as are men who are considered to be not

masculine enough. Derogatory language, for example 'sissies', 'wimps', 'nerds' and 'geeks', is often used in reference to these men. Marginalized masculinities are gender forms produced in exploited or oppressed groups such as ethnic minorities, which may share features with hegemonic masculinity, but are socially de-authorized (Connell, 2000). Complicit masculinities are organized around acceptance of the patriarchal dividend, but are not militant in defence of patriarchy. The patriarchal dividend, according to Connell (1995), is the honour, prestige and the right to command that men gain from patriarchy. Men also gain a material dividend by virtue of their average income being higher than the average income of women in most capitalist countries.

Connell regards masculine identities as fluid, contested, changeable and socially and historically constructed. This differs significantly from earlier essentialist and biological-reductionist theories that viewed identity and personality as a fixed part of the essential self, and sought to understand gender identity in terms of biological and physiological characteristics. His conceptualisation allows for a glimmer of hope for change, as the possibility exists of many different masculinities, some of which support the existing gender order, some of which oppose it and some of which exist within it, while neither opposing nor supporting gender order. There are therefore different ways of enacting being a man that do not include only the violence, aggression, independence and competitiveness that characterised men in stark contrast to caring, nurturing and interdependent women.

Wetherell and Edley (1999) critically analyse and attempt to expand on Connell's theory, and in particular his concept of hegemonic masculinity.

They argue that although the concept embodies important theoretical insights, it is not sufficiently developed to aid in our understanding of how men construct themselves as masculine. They outline a critical discursive psychology of masculinity, by delineating certain "psycho-discursive practices" through which men construct themselves as masculine. In articulating these practices, they develop the notion of "imaginary positions", and in particular heroic, ordinary and rebellious positions that participants in their study adopted to describe themselves in relation to the social position of being a man. Although Wetherell and Edley (1999) find some similarity between these "imaginary positions" and Connell's (very neat) typology of different masculine identities, they argue that the notion of "imaginary positions" can sufficiently explain the number of men who appear to be (in Connell's terms) both hegemonic and non-hegemonic, and complicit and resistant at the same time.

The current study concerns itself with men's talk about women and heterosexual relationships, and is indebted to the work of Connell and Wetherell and Edley for its conceptualisation of masculinities and masculine identity construction.

According to Hall (1996, cited in Toerien and Durrheim, 2001), the active process of constructing an identity entails defining what one is against what one is not. I therefore decided to focus my research on men's talk about women as one of the most apparent "others" against which masculinities may be relationally defined, in the context of heterosexual relationships (men's intimate relationships with the most apparent "other"),

as primary sites of gender inequality and the perpetuation of patriarchy (Gilfoyle, Wilson and Brown, 1993).

For the purpose of this article I will draw on the work of Hollway (1984) on heterosexuality. Hollway identified the *male sex drive discourse*, the *have/hold discourse* and the *permissive discourse* in her analysis of the talk of women and men about heterosexual relationships. The *male sex drive discourse* proposes that men are driven by the biological necessity to seek out heterosexual sex, and relies on the claim that sex for men is a natural need and is not mediated socially. Women are seen as the object of the male sex drive discourse, whereas men maintain the dominant position of being the subject. The *have/hold discourse* rests on the principle of the primacy of the monogamous relationship and family life. It proposes that sex should take place within the context of a lasting relationship. This discourse is commonly invoked to produce the required norms of conduct for women. Women are the subject in this discourse, in that they must be married or at least conducting a relationship in order to enter a sexual relationship, while men are designated as the objects because it is their acquisition as husbands and lovers that is required before a sexual relationship can be entered into. In the *permissive discourse* the principle of monogamy is challenged and it is considered the right of both men and women to express their sexuality in any way they choose. Although the permissive discourse is closely linked to the male sex drive discourse, it differs in that it ostensibly applies the same assumptions to men and women.

These discourses function to maintain relations of dominance and submission between men and women in heterosexual relationships, in that

the discourses make different subject positions available for people to take up in relation to other people. In the present article, these discourses were also invoked by men to construct their understanding of gender relations in male/female relationships. These will be discussed in more detail later.

Studies on masculinities in Southern Africa

There has been growing interest in research on masculinities in South Africa. For instance, Pattman (2001) focused on the various ways in which men attending a Primary Teacher's College in Zimbabwe learn to be men by eroticising and policing female students. The male students were found to be constructing hedonistic and moralistic masculinities, and the construction of their masculine identities was bound up with the problematising of women, who were said to be loose temptresses and prostitutes if they did not fit into male constructions of what it means to be a "good woman".

Kaminer and Dixon (1995) analysed the drinking talk of male university students to explore the ways in which drinking repertoires are deployed to (re)produce the ideology of masculinism. They identified *normative* and *essentialist* repertoires of masculinity. *Normative* discourse constructs masculinity as inherently different from and superior to "inferior" women, while *essentialist* discourse constructs hegemonic masculinity by way of contrast with "deviant" marginalized masculinities, such as 'nerds', 'heavy religious guys' and 'queers'. For masculinities to exist, these must therefore be constructed out of a difference from women and a difference from other men.

In a study with a very different research population, Campbell (2001) explored the transmission of HIV/AIDS amongst black mine-workers in South Africa by examining the living and working contexts in which their sexual appetites are formed. It was found that the way in which men construct and understand their masculine identities played a key role in shaping how men seek sexual intimacy and satisfaction. The mine-workers who were interviewed emphasised the importance of bravery, fearlessness and persistence in their constructions of masculinity. Repertoires of insatiable sexuality, the need for multiple partners and the desire for flesh-to-flesh sexual contact became evident in the men's talk, and it is argued that these constructions make them more vulnerable to HIV infection.

Wood & Jewkes (2001) explored the incidence of violence, especially assault and coercive sex, among Xhosa township youth living in a working-class Eastern Cape township against their sexual partners (which was found to be a common feature of young people's sexual relationships), in order to examine connections between this kind of violence and the notions of masculinity that are predominant among local male youth. It was found that "successful" masculinity for these young men was partially constructed through their ability to access and control the "right" women through violent practices such as assault and coercive sex, in order to gain the respect and prestige of their male peers. Patriarchal ideas about male entitlement to women and the importance of men asserting hierarchy in their sexual relationships seem prevalent.

The current article focuses on the interpretive repertoires men deploy to account for and construct their masculine identities, but also on

discourses of heterosexuality invoked in the service of perpetuating patriarchy and male dominance in relationships with women. In spite of increased interest in the study of men and masculinity in South Africa (Morrell, 2001), there has been little focus on heterosexuality. The present article is an attempt to address this apparent dearth in the existing literature in the field of masculinities, particularly in a South African context.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The participants were eight male students aged between 20 and 27 in third year or honours level studies in Psychology at the University of the Western Cape, a historically black educational institution situated in Cape Town. The Apartheid regime created separate spaces for education for people of different "races".¹ The University of the Western Cape was an institution of higher education reserved for "coloured" people in the era of Apartheid and became the intellectual hive of the struggle for liberation in the Western Cape, spawning a number of influential scholars and activists.

Seven participants were black, while one participant was white and identified himself as Jewish. Most of the participants, with the exception of the Jewish man who lives in the more affluent southern suburbs of Cape Town, live in a working class environment in an area known as the Cape Flats, a vast expanse of land to which "coloured" and black people were relocated following the introduction of the Group Areas Act in the 1960s. It has become an area known for gang-related activities, high levels of unemployment, and generally poor socio-economic circumstances. One

participant came from a small coastal community approximately 50 kilometres from Cape Town known as the Strand, and commuted to the university on a daily basis.

One participant hailed from the Eastern Cape and reported spending some of his childhood years living in a remote rural village in the ex-Ciskei bantustan before moving to an urban black township in East London. The bantustans were areas reserved for the occupancy of black people in the Apartheid era. A "buffer zone" of white-owned farms and small towns, known as the Border region, separated the Ciskei from the Transkei. East London was the port city of the Border region. Migration became a necessity for young men in search of employment, or further schooling, in the cities (Mager, 1998). Following the abolition of Apartheid, the bantustans now form part of the Eastern Cape region and are no longer considered to be areas of separate development, although there has been little change in the physical and the social landscapes.

Of the seven black participants, six were "coloured" and one African. One participant was Muslim and one was Hindu.

One participant spoke Xhosa as his first language, one participant spoke Afrikaans and two participants spoke English, while four participants spoke both English and Afrikaans. The group discussions were conducted in English, which is the medium of instruction at the university and is therefore the language medium which most of the respondents are comfortable with, specifically in the university context.

I requested the participation of the male third-year Psychology students after a Psychology lecture, following discussions with lecturers in

the Psychology Department at the University about the most beneficial way of recruiting participants for my study. The Psychology Honours students were approached informally, after approval to conduct the interviews was obtained from the course co-ordinator.

Three group discussions were held - two group meetings with one group comprising of two third-year Psychology students and one Psychology honours student, and one group meeting with a group comprising of five Psychology honours students. The group discussions lasted approximately one to one and a half hours and were audio and video-taped. The group discussions were fully transcribed².

A male MA Research Psychology student in his final year at the University of the Western Cape facilitated the group discussions. A male facilitator was decided upon because I was mindful that my direct participation in the group discussions in the role of facilitator would act as a constraint by prohibiting participants from expressing themselves freely, and that the participants would be tempted to say what they thought, a woman in the process of doing a feminist study about men and masculinity, would like to hear. The facilitator had previous experience in conducting group discussions or focus groups and had on many occasions assisted postgraduate students with group facilitation. The facilitator was briefed fully about the aims of the study as well as the style of interviewing most suited to those aims (see Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

I decided to conduct group discussions instead of individual interviews because I was interested in exploring how a range of ideas surrounding gender relations in heterosexual relationships was negotiated

between men. According to Millward (1995) the use of the group discussion or focus group format highlights the impact of social interaction on the use of culturally available ideas as participants aim to make sense of particular phenomena. In addition, the relatively informal group situation together with open-ended questions facilitates greater interaction and discussion amongst participants (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

The group discussions were conducted in a therapy room at the Institute for Counselling at the University of the Western Cape that has video-taping facilities, with the researcher placed behind the one-way mirror to observe the process. Following each group discussion, the process was evaluated, and comments about the process were obtained from the participants in the presence of the researcher.

Vignettes were used to initiate discussion. The four vignettes were drafted after I spoke to male friends and colleagues about difficult situations in their relationships with women. Vignettes were used because this allowed participants to discuss sensitive and personal issues without actually having to focus on themselves. The vignettes were followed by questions aimed at initiating discussion. Vignettes have been used successfully in other studies on gender and masculinities (Riley, 2001; Harris, Lea and Foster, 1995). While the vignettes were stated as factually as possible, it needs to be acknowledged that they provide the impetus for particular kinds of complicit or resistant discussions, and for particular kinds of repertoires and discourses to be invoked, with regard to heterosexual relationships and masculine identities.

The following vignettes were used in the group discussions.

Vignette 1: Paul and Jenny

Paul and Jenny met when they were both in their final year at university, and have been together for almost two years. Since graduating, Jenny managed to find a good job at an established accountancy firm, while Paul has been less fortunate and continued to work for Mr Delivery, his part-time job since university. Paul is struggling financially, and sometimes has to ask Jenny to lend him money, which he always pays back. Very often now, Jenny pays for both of them when they go clubbing or to the movies.

Vignette 2: Joanne and Neville

Joanne and Neville have been together for three years. They decided to move in together recently (very much to the disappointment of their parents), because neither of them feel ready for the commitment of marriage yet. They have frequent fights about domestic issues, such as cooking, doing the dishes and washing the laundry. Neville sometimes helps Joanne with these tasks, but most often Joanne does most of the housework.

Vignette 3: Melissa and Shaun

Melissa and Shaun have been seeing each other for a few months. He is a civil engineering student at Peninsula Technikon, and Melissa is a second-year B.Sc. student at UWC. Melissa stays in residence and Shaun often stays over in her room. Late one night, Shaun decided to pay Melissa a surprise visit after returning from a night out with his friends. When he got

to her room, he found her intoxicated (in spite of his requests that she limit her alcohol intake), and in bed with another guy he had often seen her talking to. Shaun left without a confrontation because the other guy was a member of the UWC rugby team who was feared by everyone because of his regular involvement in fights at the university pub.

Vignette 4: Tracy and John

Tracy and John, both in their first year at university, have been together for four months. They really enjoy each other's company and have a lot of fun together. Lately, though, there has been some tension in the relationship, arising from Tracy's unwillingness to have sex with John because she feels that she is not ready for a sexual relationship yet.

The following guiding questions were used with each of the four vignettes:

What do you think of this situation?

What do you think (male character) should do?

What do you think (female character) should do?

What would you have done if you were in (male character)'s place?

Have you known people in similar situations? What was it like for them?

What do you think people will say about (the male character)?

What do you think people will say about (the female character)?

During the first group discussion, vignettes 1 and 2 were used to initiate discussion. Participants in group discussion two discussed vignette

3. For the third group discussion, vignettes 1, 2 and 4 were used. Due to time constraints resulting from imminent examinations, participants in the first group discussion were unable to re-convene for a discussion centering on the events depicted vignettes 3 and 4.

Although the participants were not specifically questioned about their sexual orientation, from their talk it would appear that all participants located themselves as heterosexual.

Being a woman researching men and masculinities involves a number of interesting issues related to age, class, gender and race (see Willot, 1998), some of which deserve mention at this stage.

Upon approaching the male third-year students I was met with young men who had very little interest in taking part in the research I proposed. Despondently, I spoke to a fellow student who suggested that she take the male facilitator with me should I decide to speak to the third-year students again, because I may not have been taken seriously because I am a woman. Furthermore, I am soft-spoken and of slight build and is therefore often mistaken as an undergraduate student.

My presence behind the one-way mirror seemed to have a significant impact on the interview proceedings, possibly causing the young men to be careful in their responses about the scenarios. Even though the facilitator could have been viewed as a male ally and had a similar background to the respondents, this did not minimise the effect that the researcher seemingly had on the interview proceedings. The men's polite and careful talk, in some instances, could also be ascribed to the university context where sexist talk is generally frowned upon and men strive to be viewed as non-sexist.

In a sense, as a woman and as a researcher I was at times both empowered and disempowered. The relatively powerful position of researcher and masters student functioned to constrain the respondents, while the researcher as young woman had certain drawbacks, especially in the process of recruiting respondents.

I was also careful to remain constantly aware of my own assumptions about the nature of the men's talk as almost inevitably sexist. These assumptions emanate from my experience of conversations between male friends about women (where my interest in conducting research of this nature originated), which were invariably and unashamedly tainted with sexism. However, in the research process, I had to steer clear of becoming a voyeur, because, as Willot (1998:175) pointed out: "if I simply analyse male discourse in terms of a unitary patriarchy, I will be merely using the flip side of the same coin and pathologize men". Pathologizing men is therefore not what I set out to do, and hopefully it is not what I succeeded in doing.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Analysis of discourse was done in accordance with the method developed by Potter and Wetherell (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). This approach has been widely used in research on men and masculinity (Gough, 1998, 2001; Gough and Peace, 2000; Wetherell and Edley, 1998, 1999).

The approach treads between two competing theoretical approaches: a more fine-grained form of discursive psychology influenced by

conversation analysis and a more global form of analysis derived from post-structuralism. Wetherell and Edley (1998, 1999) are of the opinion that the sharp division between the two approaches has been a mistake, and argue for a more eclectic base to discursive psychology.

This approach emphasizes the action orientation talk as explicated by conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists. This is combined with post-structuralist and Foucauldian-influenced notions of discourse that are concerned with discourse as organized by "institutional forms of intelligibility" (Shapiro, cited in Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 337) which have a history and which imbricate power relations. Wetherell and Edley (1998, 1999) argue that this synthetic approach best captures the paradoxical relationship between discourse and the speaking subject, and Billig (1991, cited in Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 337) suggests that the approach "allows us to embrace the fact that people are at the same time, both the products and producers of language".

The interview data was fully transcribed, after which I coded or grouped the body of discourse into manageable chunks, all related to the research topic (Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). I then searched for patterns in the data, either patterns of variability in the form or content of accounts, or identified features shared by accounts in order to gain a deeper understanding of the functions that participants' talk fulfils, the effects of the talk and the variability in their talk.

Potter and Wetherell (1987: 90) developed the notion of "interpretive repertoires" to refer to "broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions, common-places and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors or

vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles". They preferred the use of this term to "discourse" in the sense that the term is used by Parker (1990), drawing on the work of Foucault, to refer to regulated systems or sets of statements which construct objects. People are familiar with a range of repertoires for a given topic and will draw on these repertoires in a flexible and variable way, according to the function of their talk about a particular topic (Kaminer and Dixon, 1995).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the group discussions led to the identification of three repertoires of masculinities: the male-as-provider, male-as-protector and the "New Man" repertoire. The male-as-provider repertoire is concerned with being a man who can adequately provide for his family. The respondents voice feelings of insecurity and powerlessness if they do not fit this construction of masculinity, since being a good provider also affords men power in the household, in the extended family and in the community.

The male-as-protector repertoire, where the physically stronger male acts as the protector of the weaker woman, is tainted with nuances of male ownership and appropriation of women with whom heterosexual relationships are entered into, and the legitimization of male-on-male violence for the purpose of protection of the woman as the property of the man.

Quite contrary to expectations, a third repertoire, the "New Man" repertoire, which is pro-feminist and egalitarian, became a common feature

of the men's talk. In this repertoire men are constructed as being accepting of changing gender roles, and as being reflexive and critical in their relationships with women. This repertoire is important in that it is an indication that current oppressive constructions of masculinity, heterosexuality and gender are changing.

Drawing on the work of Hollway (1984, 1989), two discourses of heterosexuality are also discussed - the have/hold discourse and the permissive discourse. I also link the "New Man" repertoire with the have/hold discourse, in the manner in which this discourse was invoked by the participants in this research.

Male as breadwinner / provider

Traditional discourses of masculinity describe the man as the member of the family who goes out to make a living, the "good provider" who is able to take care of his wife and children financially. Earning a decent living is therefore a primary aspect of masculine identity construction (Willot and Griffin, 1998). When it becomes impossible for men to remain the provider, or when the female in the relationship becomes the breadwinner or the primary wage earner, this definition will come under pressure (Connell, 1995:90, Willot and Griffin, 1998).

The male as breadwinner repertoire was invoked particularly in response to the situation described in Vignette 1, where the woman in the relationship earned more than the man. A., a Xhosa-speaking African man from the Eastern Cape who came to Cape Town to pursue tertiary studies,

describes that he would feel "powerless" in a situation in which, emanating from his inability to "hunt", his wife appropriated the role of "hunter".

Extract 1

A: It would make things bad, because you know we grow up in an environment whereby we men have to (.) we are hunters, hunter-gatherers and we have to go out and hunt. Now if your wife hunts for you it's something different, it's going to make you as a man feel powerless, so like your hands are tied because you are the one in the house who has to look to everything [...]

(Group Discussion 1)

D., the Jewish man, voiced feelings of insecurity in response to a situation in which he was not the primary wage earner:

Extract 2

D: I would feel, think I would feel quite insecure in that situation, even though I wouldn't want to be, I can almost get a sense of if I was in a situation similar that I'm dependent on someone else and I think my ego would take a big blow and it would affect our relationship.

(Group Discussion 1)

Z., a married Muslim man in his mid-twenties and father of an eight-month-old daughter, describes pressure from the "older generation" (as Z. refers to older family members) as well as from "Western society" to conform to traditional notions of the man as breadwinner. Z. relates to the situation depicted in the vignette, because at present he is studying and working part-time on campus, while his wife is the primary wage earner in

their household. The "older generation" finds it unacceptable that Z. should rely on his wife's earnings for the maintenance of their family unit.

Extract 3

Z: [...] Western society sees males as having to be the breadwinner, and that was an issue that was raised with me as well where the older generation family members approached me and said you know, what are you gonna do for work, how you gonna get in money, and to them it was I couldn't rely on my wife [...]

(Group Discussion 1)

Later in the discussion A. shares his experience of his initiation ceremony, a rite of passage during which young Xhosa males are circumcised and where the rules of manhood are laid down to young initiates. Circumcision signifies masculine identity and male power, and places young men on the path of marriage and fatherhood (Mäger, 1998). According to A., a core responsibility of manhood is "bringing the food":

Extract 4

A: ... This is how things were done, this is how its gonna be (.) don't let education, this is what people was telling me (.) don't let education fool you and all those things and don't let the Western kind of theories change things around, I'm quoting from the elders who are talking to me while I'm in my blanket and getting hot under the sun, understand, because I still have to go out in the world (.) now I'm a new man and they're sort of giving me a book I should keep here (.) you're the man, you bring the food, you do all those things [...]

(Group Discussion 1)

Money is equated with power in the household. In the following extract A. describes this shift in power relations when the man is not earning

a salary, and is rendered powerless in the home by the woman who is the primary wage earner:

Extract 5

A: [...] but in terms of your wife earning more or something and you are not earning as a man there's a bit of a shift because you don't have the power to say do this or do that, because she's going to say at the end of the day I earn the money so you listen to me [...]
(Group Discussion 1)

Men who do not conform to traditional notions of the male as breadwinner/provider are excluded from male-dominated communal decision-making practices, known as the *inkundla* (Mager, 1998), in the village or township because they are not considered to be "man-enough":

Extract 6

A: It's nice that we have all this (.) It's nice also to mix tradition with [] because back in the day, we go to the rural areas where we still have tradition (.) [] and you find that a man is supposed to take certain decisions within the house, you do this, you do this I'm not saying, (.) maybe it's patriarchal, but it is how things are, it's how things were. So, you said, you do this, you do that, like everyone has their duties to follow, but now what I'm trying to raise here is that if this is not done that household by the female, within the community that man is going to be powerless, it's like a ripple effect, he is not going to be able to make certain decisions maybe within certain gatherings for male elders. They will say fix your house, your wife is ruling you, can't come and tell us, understand what I'm saying. So fix your house first and then come and talk to us, because these are men we say what we want to in our houses so go back and wash those dishes or whatever [...]
(Group Discussion 1)

Hegemonic masculinity is linked to authority, a key theme in the legitimisation of patriarchy (Connell, 1995), and men who are perceived as not ascribing to dominant constructions of masculinity, such as not being the breadwinner in the household, are deprived of their authority in the home and in their community, presenting a real difficulty for the maintenance of patriarchal power.

Prestige and the right to command are dividends men gain from patriarchy (Connell, 1995), and in A.'s community and Z.'s extended family, dividends are seemingly taken away from men who do not ascribe to dominant/hegemonic constructions of masculinity by other men. Z. finds that his failure to fit neatly into the male-as-provider repertoire are a constant source of concern for older family members, for whom his way of being a man is totally unacceptable.

Alternative masculinities are thus stigmatised or silenced by hegemonic masculinities. Men who do not conform to traditional hegemonic constructions of masculinity are constantly pressurised to change, made to feel powerless and insecure. To be successful as a man, therefore, implies being a good provider, and with that comes power and authority in the household and extended family, and in communal decision-making practices.

Male as protector

Men are traditionally viewed as being the courageous, self-reliant and physically strong protectors of more vulnerable and physically weaker women and children.

The male-as-protector repertoire was invoked in response to the situation described in Vignette 3 in the third group discussion, in Extract 7. The respondents discuss their reactions to a situation in which a young man finds his girlfriend in bed with another man.

Extract 7

Q: [...] the first thing you're gonna think about is look this guy is not supposed to be with her, she's with me, so the first thing you've got to do is get him out of the bed and I mean, and I mean, if you think about it in today's society that is expected, because you get socialised, look the male is supposed to take care of the female.

(Group Discussion 2)

In Extract 8, M. discusses people's possible responses to the non-confrontational, yet hurt, male character in Vignette 3 who does not act in what is considered to be a traditionally male manner by initiating a physically violent confrontation with the "other man". This omission to fight for what he wants is a sign of weakness, of not being "man-enough". Again, there is considerable tension with hegemonic constructions of men as "naturally aggressive" (Connell, 1995) and there are attempts at defending the non-aggressive and non-violent male character.

Extract 8

M: [...] they would most probably think that, they would most probably frown, you know, thinking that wow this guy isn't man enough or why can't he take care of his girlfriend, you know, why did he allow someone else to take his girlfriend, to do with his girlfriend whatever he want to do with her, so it all depends. People have different views you know.

(Group Discussion 2)

The other male character is constructed as a "street buff" who has a lot of experience in "street fighting". M. does not identify with this construction when he speaks in support of the non-confrontational male, but he is very much aware of what more "macho", and it would seem more acceptable, responses to the situation would have been.

In Extract 9, the "other guy" is said to have shown disrespect towards the non-confrontational boyfriend, and this act of disrespect is a violation of "not only her" but also the boyfriend:

Extract 9

M: [...] or if I was a street buff I would most probably say, Shaun let's kick this guy's butt... (*N. & Q. voices agreement*) let's kick this guy's butt, because he's violating you and not only her (.) you know, he doesn't have respect for you.

(Group Discussion 2)

The situation as described in Vignette 3 becomes an issue between men, and the presence of the woman is secondary. Violating the woman is violating the man, signifying male ownership of the woman with whom he is in a relationship. In this act of violation, a response of violence ("Let's kick this guy's butt") is therefore warranted, because the manhood of the non-confrontational male character is at stake and has been threatened by the heinous act of violation of "his" woman, and thus of him. Violence can therefore be used as a means of asserting masculinity (Connell, 1995), and as a legitimate means of protecting one's interests.

The male as protector repertoire is also invoked in relation to the male character's requests that his girlfriend limit her alcohol intake (see extracts 10 and 11).

Extract 10

N.: It would be fair if she agrees =

M.: = Perhaps =

N.: = As he said on previous occasions maybe she can't handle that amount of alcohol he can and so he's probably doing it out of care for her not just being dominating, so to speak =

M.: = Absolutely. Absolutely =

N.: = But caring for her, knowing that she can't handle a lot of alcohol.

(Group Discussion 2)

Extract 11

M: [...] at that moment he thought like a male person, he thought like a man would think about the reason why a woman shouldn't drink and that is why I agree with what Q. said (.) women are vulnerable when it comes to alcohol intake. I also heard a lot of guys saying that they don't want their girlfriend with because of that, you know.

(Group Discussion 2)

The possibility that the girlfriend engaged in "inappropriate behaviour" on previous occasions is mentioned as another possible reason for the boyfriend's request with regards to her alcohol intake. The boyfriend's actions stem from a need not only to protect the female character from other men, but also to protect her from her own impulses, which she is unable to control when she is intoxicated. Some types of behaviour, such as drinking excessively, are clearly not considered appropriate behaviour for women. Kaminer and Dixon (1995), in their

analysis of the drinking talk of men, found that women were constructed as lacking the necessary skills for entering, or negotiating the male-dominated domain of drinking successfully.

The male-as-protector repertoire is thus also deployed as a means of the man controlling the behaviour of the "wayward" woman, thus perpetuating the continued domination of women by men.

The "New Man"

"New men" accept changing gender roles and strive to be non-sexist. They are more willing to share in domestic responsibilities, are emotionally more responsive and more critical of their own practices. The repertoire of the "New Man" constituted a frequent aspect of the young men's discourse, who take pride in their construction of their identities as men who are critical of the existing gender order and who pride themselves on being sensitive to the needs of women. Although men who invoke the "New Man" repertoire probably constitute a small minority in South African society, it would seem that a discursive space has been created in which traditional notions about women and heterosexual relationships, marriage and family are opposed, in favour of talk about equality between partners.

Extract 12 is part of Q.'s response to a discussion about the division of labour in the home. Q. acknowledges the fact that dual-career families should share the responsibility for domestic tasks, and that housework should not only be women's work.

Extract 12

Q: For me personally, I believe that any relationship has to be fifty-fifty, you share the responsibility, you share the good times and the bad times, and from what he's doing there he's basically pushing everything onto her, although he helps her out sometimes, I mean, if you maybe not knowing the full content of the story now, for me what comes through is that he might just help out when she moans about it, it's not like out of his own, because the thing is, for me its fifty-fifty in a relationship. I mean because one can't do it alone, because you can't be expected to run the household, go to work, and take care of somebody on top of that. I mean, where's the communication, where's the help and the understanding that you're supposed to get from the relationship, it's supposed to be something that you can both grow from.

(Group Discussion 3)

Q. uses the word "moan" when referring to the female character's voicing of her dissatisfaction about doing most of the household tasks on her own. The "moaning/nagging woman" is a construction of femininity often deployed by men in everyday talk about wives or partners, and in the popular media, and it does seem that in spite of Q.'s sympathetic and critical stance, this negative construction of feminine identity still prevails in his discourse.

Z. embodies the "New Man". He is involved in childcare activities, he shares the household responsibilities with his wife, and is a full-time student while his wife is working and earning an income. The day before the group discussion took place, Z.'s wife left for Wales to take up a scholarship, leaving their eight-month-old daughter in his care. Of course, he has the assistance of the older women in his extended family. Z.'s wife does not escape the wrath of family members and (one would expect) other

members of their community, who whisper scathingly about her conduct and pity Z. for the situation in which he finds himself.

The "New Man" identity repertoire is not without some personal cost. Z. frequently speaks of the pressure of the "older generation", who insist that he be a good male role model for his other cousins in the extended family structure:

Extract 13

Z: I am the eldest cousin on my mother's side and there's the whole patriarchal thing where I have to be the role model for the other cousins and when kind of my wife was pregnant my one aunt told me I hope you're not going to be one of those guys that changes nappies and stuff, and I said I am gonna be like that other guy who changes nappies and stuff and she was concerned about the role model I would be for the other cousins and I said but that's the role model I want to be, and she wasn't quite happy with that, so, *(laughter)*.

(Group Discussion 1)

Later in the discussion (Extract 14), Z. laments the difficulty of "going against your upbringing", which indicates the extent of the struggle between the old and the new and allows for a glimpse into the complexity of masculine identity construction. It also demonstrates the difficulties men experience when adopting alternative constructions of masculinity.

Extract 14

Z: I think it depends on the people that's in that relationship. Like I say, if both parties are comfortable in those roles and it works for them, then it's fine, and I think the majority of people are comfortable in those roles, 'cause it's not a comfortable place to be in when you have to question your whole upbringing, you know, you question the whole framework that

you were raised in, it's not a comfortable space and people don't like being in uncomfortable spaces.

(Group Discussion 1)

Z. is extremely critical of other (more hegemonic) men, and in Extract 15 clearly constructs himself as different from these men who do not practice what they preached in the Apartheid era:

Extract 15

Z: [...] I've seen friends who have come through the community organisations in Mitchell's Plain in the Apartheid days with slogans of non-sexism and non-racism, all the non-isms, getting married and the husband swelling to twice his size, he comes home from work, plops himself down on the couch and expects everything to be brought to him. That's the same person that ten years ago was preaching non-sexism and non-racism [...]

(Group Discussion 1)

K. emphasizes the importance of being sensitive and reflexive in his relationships with women:

Extract 16

K.: I think now, in my relationships with women, I find myself being a bit more sensitive, because we don't want to make the same mistakes that was made before, you know, like what I find myself doing is I ask like when I was in a relationship with a woman was do you think anyone of us is dominant in this relationship, it's like a power thing and I kept on asking myself is this present here just to check because sometimes you do things unconsciously just because it's easier, you know.

(Group Discussion 1)

These examples, and other occurrences of challenge to the existing gender order that are not mentioned here, have in common that they were expressed in an arena where voices of dissent were relegated to the margins, particularly in the first group discussion. Z. and K. had to be almost forceful in getting their points across and none of the accounts cited above elicited verbalisations of either agreement or disagreement from other group members. Participants in the second group more readily expressed opposition to traditional notions of masculinity and heterosexuality than those in the first group.

The "New Man" repertoire represents instances of resistance to hegemonic masculinity, and corresponds to Wetherell and Edley's (1999) "rebellious position", where men take pride in their unconventionality, and in their rejection of macho masculinity.

This repertoire, as has been demonstrated in the above extracts, leads men to feel pressurized to conform to hegemonic notions of what it means to be a man, or to confusion due to conflicting demands from pro-feminist partners or more liberal perspectives on gender relations. There seems to be a "heaviness" attached to being a "New Man", and men who adopt this alternative construction of masculinity appear to be in a constant struggle between the old and generally more accepted versus the new and relatively unknown.

These critical voices are important in that they allow for a glimpse into what alternative ways of performing masculinity might look like, and I am thus in agreement with the findings of the study by Harris, Lea and Foster (1995) which identifies a need for further research involving men

who actively resist traditional constructs of masculinity. However, as Wetherell and Edley (1999) point out: while these "rebellious positions" could be used as a sanction for new social practices, they are also used to celebrate the courage and determination of men who dare to step outside of hegemonic constructions of masculinity through independence, autonomy and rationality, characteristics which have in the past worked in gender-oppressive ways.

Repertoires of heterosexuality

Hollway's (1984, 1989) approach provides one of the most noteworthy attempts at analysing talk about relationships and heterosexuality. She argues that people are embedded in socially articulated discourses that are deployed to construct our roles and provide us with "subject positions" from which to speak.

Hollway (1984) identified three discourses that inform people's talk about heterosexuality: the male sexual drive discourse, the have/hold discourse and the permissive discourse. According to Hollway (1989) these discourses do not refer to actual entities, but are heuristic tools to help in organizing the accounts of participants. Her use of the term "discourse" follows that established by Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine (1984:105) and is similar to the manner in which Parker (1990) uses the term (following on the work of Foucault) to denote a regulated system of statements that construct an object and organize meaning and action. Gilfoyle, Wilson & Brown (1993) sought to extend Hollway's analysis by

elaborating on a fourth discourse for talking about heterosexual sex, which they termed the pseudo-reciprocal gift discourse.

Two of the three discourses identified by Hollway (1984, 1989) in talk about heterosexual relationships were also invoked in the current research: the have/hold discourse and the permissive discourse, and will be discussed briefly.

The male sex drive discourse, of which the central proposition is that men are driven by the biological necessity to seek out heterosexual sex, was not invoked, or only vaguely so, in the men's talk. This could be due to the university context where men strive to be perceived as non-sexist, and because in the context of higher education the male sex drive discourse has been rendered redundant or intellectually problematic. It could also be a result of the research context, where the female researcher was placed behind a one-way mirror able to observe the discussions, and respondents were aware that the female researcher would subsequently analyse and report on the discussions.

Have/hold Discourse

A familiar proposition within Christian family values is that sex should take place within the framework of a lasting relationship. In principle this discourse is gender-blind, but in practice it is applied more stringently to women, with the effect of the well-known double standard.

Q. invokes the have/hold discourse in Extract 17, where a meaningful relationship is a prerequisite for a sexual relationship for a woman (Gilfoyle, Wilson and Brown, 1993). The existence of a four-month

relationship and "having fun" is used as justification for the male character's wish to have sex with the female character.

Extract 17

Q: [...] But if you take it from a guy's point of view, I mean you would obviously think like look it's four months and we're having fun together so why not?

(Group Discussion 3)

In Extract 18, Q. invokes the have/hold discourse that centres on the primacy of the relationship, and is linked with ideas of monogamy. Q. is responding to the situation depicted in Vignette 3, and is of the opinion that the relationship between the female character and the unfortunate boyfriend who finds her in bed with the rugby player, was not "strong enough", hence the infidelity of the female character:

Extract 18

Q: [...] but I mean, maybe if the relationship was strong they would not have been in that position in the first place. I mean a relationship takes work and if you're gonna go and do your own separate thing and she goes out and does her separate thing, so then where does the basic connection then come in?

(Group Discussion 2)

Q. mentions that "a relationship takes work". This theme was recurrent across all three transcripts. Traditionally, emotional labour in relationships was seen as women's work, with men being the distant and uncommunicative parties in relationships. The respondents in this study seem to have moved away from this construction of heterosexuality,

acknowledging that communication is vital in maintaining a sound relationship. In this study, men are constructed as sensitive communicators, which corresponds with the "New Man" repertoire of masculinity as identified and discussed in the previous section. But, yet again, being a "New Man" in the context of heterosexual relationships can have detrimental effects, and being sensitive and communicative can be quite an unappreciated undertaking, as M. in Extract 19 explicates (in response to the situation depicted in Vignette 3):

Extract 19

M [...] Like the scenario you sketched for us, you see that is the kind of thing that happens with guys who are sensitive and value their relationships.

Being a "sensitive man" in heterosexual relationships, even though it is an identity construction supported by most of the young men who participated in this study, is perceived as an ostensibly perilous endeavour. As with the "New Man" repertoire, the adoption of an alternative identity in heterosexual relationships comes at considerable personal cost.

Permissive discourse

In this discourse the principle of monogamy is challenged. People have the right to express their sexuality in any way as long as nobody is hurt. This discourse is (in principle) gender-blind and the right to express their sexuality applies equally to youth of both sexes, although the discourse is not always invoked in this manner in talk about women, where "permissive" women are often labelled negatively, in contrast to

"permissive" men for whom sex is a naturally pleasurable activity. In this discourse, the sexual partner is a vehicle for sexual pleasure. This discourse is similar to the male sexual drive discourse where the object is "woman", and in contrast to the have/hold discourse where the partnership is the central principle.

In Extract 20, Q. is referring to the situation depicted in Vignette 3, which would not be totally unexpected if the relationship was "just a casual fling".

Extract 20

Q: I guess it would come back to how strong the relationship was, how strong your feelings were for her, because if you went into it both understanding, look we're in a relationship, but it's not that serious, I'll see you, you'll see them, it's not something that you wouldn't be expecting.

(Group Discussion 2)

According to the permissive discourse in which women could be subjects and not passive objects, women could initiate a sexual relationship because our sex drives were equal to, or the same as, men's. This initiation of sexual relationships is only allowed if women are not involved in monogamous relationships, where sex should only take place within that context. In the above extract, the woman is the subject of the permissive discourse, and at the same time the object of the have/hold discourse.

In response to the question of what people would say about the female character in Vignette 3, the woman is labelled as a "slut", as "having no moral standing", for "drinking herself drunk and taking guys to her

room". This demonstrates the cost of being a subject in the permissive discourse for women. The same judgement is of course not applied to men, who, when they engage in similar "permissive" behaviour, are applauded by male peers for their sexual prowess.

N. responds to this in the following manner:

Extract 21

N: It would be completely different if he was in res and his girlfriend normally slept over and he was found with another girl, I mean he'll be labelled completely different from what she [was labelled].

(Group Discussion 2)

The issue of the "double standard" is brought up again several times in the conversation. Although it must be acknowledged that some men do take a more progressive stance in their perceptions about women in heterosexual relationships, this criticism of the existence of a "double standard" for men and women, and men's recognition of the sexist nature of society, has done very little in changing the practices of gender inequality that are integral to heterosexual relationships (Hollway, 1984).

CONCLUSIONS

In this article a number of interpretive repertoires were identified which young male, mostly working class, university students deploy to account for themselves as men, and for their social worlds. Respondents invoked dominant repertoires of masculinity such as male-as-provider and

male-as-protector. From the men's discourse it became apparent that they experienced feelings of insecurity if they failed to subscribe to these dominant repertoires, and confusion as a result of the conflicting demands of traditional and more enlightened discourses of masculinity. The men were also pressurised to conform to these traditional notions of masculinity by family members and their community, signifying the pervasiveness of hegemonic constructions of masculinity. The current research therefore appears to confirm Connell's (1987, 1995, 2000) contention that most men live in a state of conflict with the hegemonic masculinity of their culture or community.

A strong critical voice became apparent, which I termed the "New Man" repertoire, and which stood in opposition to, rather than in support of, current gender relations. The "New Man" repertoire corresponds with what Wetherell and Edley (1999) term the "rebellious position" in that men who occupy this "imaginary position" take pride in their courage to oppose conventional hegemonic constructions of masculinity.

Drawing on the work of Hollway (1984, 1989) on heterosexuality, discourses of heterosexuality were also identified. Participants invoked the have/hold discourse and the permissive discourse in which men positioned themselves and women in a gender-differentiated manner. A third discourse as identified by Hollway (1984, 1989), the male sex drive discourse, was noticeably absent in the men's talk.

The invocation of the "New Man" repertoire and the absence of the male sex drive discourse in the men's talk is perhaps a result of the university context that disciplines men to speak about women and

heterosexuality in a manner that is considered politically correct, as well as the research context, where the presence of the female researcher seemed to have a significant effect on the outcome of the discussions. A further possibility exists that the male sex drive discourse has been rendered intellectually redundant and was therefore only vaguely invoked. It could also be argued that, in spite of their apparent critical stance against oppressive forms of masculinity, these "New Men" still benefit from their accrual of the *patriarchal dividend* (Connell, 1995).

The presence of "New Man" talk may be an indication of the impact of feminist politics in intimate male-female relationships, and the power of the woman in heterosexual relationships, so often underestimated, to negotiate more favourable conditions in which a relationship that is by (feminist) definition always unequal, can be sustained.

The men's talk does signify the possibility of change toward less oppressive gender relations. Morrell's (2001) optimism is perhaps not unfounded when he asserts that not all men are violent and aggressive, and expresses his disdain at the common stereotype of South African men as chauvinistic, misogynistic and homophobic. I was certainly surprised at the strong progressive voice that was evident throughout the interviews, quite contrary to my expectations at the outset of this project.

Although some respondents appeared critical of traditional hegemonic constructions of masculinity and heterosexual relationships, even seeming pro-feminist, the men's talk was at times laced with negative constructions of femininity and sexist remarks. In spite of the more progressive context of higher education, and some respondents' ostensibly

progressive stance, alternative constructions of masculinity seem to be merely a drop in the vast ocean of patriarchy and sexism. The acknowledgement of and ability to recognize the sexist nature of talk about women and heterosexual relationships and a fluency in the language of opposition and resistance that comes with the privilege of higher education, should not be ignored. Indeed, as Harris, Lea and Foster (1995) rightly argued, instances of opposition and resistance to patriarchy warrant further research in order to render it even more explicit. However, it does seem that we have a long way to go still in affecting real changes to the current gender order, which is still primarily supportive of traditional constructions of patriarchy.

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NOTES

¹ Even though I oppose the racist nomenclature that originated in the Apartheid era under the Population Registration Act of 1950, these divisions are still very much a reality in post-Apartheid South Africa, and need to be reflected in this paper, because of the analytical weight this carries. The term "Coloured" as used here refers to people of "mixed descent", while black refers to people who are not white, and African refers to people who were formerly classified as "Bantu".

² Extracts have been simplified in the interest of readability, and detailed nuances of pronunciation, speed and intonation were ignored. Transcription conventions used (adapted from Wetherell and Edley (1999) and Gough (1998)):

[] - inaudible

[text] - probable content

(.) - short untimed pause

[*text*] - explanatory material

= - other speaker comes in

[...] - material omitted by author.