

The cinema of Willie Esterhuizen: the quest for sex and hegemonic masculinity¹

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ABSTRACT

In this article I critically discuss how Willie Esterhuizen's films explicitly present an affirmative heteronormative hegemonic masculinity despite numerous queer, destabilising possibilities that threaten such dominant masculinity. I read Esterhuizen's films in terms of their consistent safe-making of homoerotic possibilities. To show how hegemonic heteronormative masculinity features across Esterhuizen's film *oeuvre*, his comedies *Lipstiek Dipstiek* (1994), *Poena is Koning* (2007), *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat* (2008) and *Stoute Boudjies* (2010) will be investigated in this regard.

In this investigation, I will discuss how Esterhuizen's films:

- present a narrative foregrounding a quest for sexual intercourse as an integral part of post-apartheid white masculinity;
- utilise notions of anality (as mostly based in farting and verbal references to defecation) in relation to masculinity;
- point to a masculinity of (bodily) control;
- present various moments of homosociality and even homoeroticism in the relationships between male characters that threaten heteronormative masculinity but are, in the end, consistently trumped by hegemonic masculinity.

Keywords: Anality, control, hegemonic masculinity, sex, Willie Esterhuizen

Introduction

Willie Esterhuizen's directorial film debut *Lipstiek Dipstiek* ('Lipstick Dipstick') arrived on South African movie screens in 1994, the year South Africa formally became a democracy after decades of apartheid. In *Lipstiek Dipstiek* (1994), Esterhuizen presented a picture of white South Africa struggling to cope with the forces of political change in a decidedly different manner: suddenly, Afrikaners were swearing and having sex on screen, and the local minister, long a symbol of Calvinist puritanism and a figure closely associated with theologically motivated social policy, turned out to be a cross dresser. This depiction was quite a rupture of the masculine Afrikaner often characterised by 'heterosexuality and political conservatism' (Du Pisani cited by Vincent 2006:355).

As Vincent (2006:350) explains, South Africa's political transition was not a once-off event contained to 1994, but a continuing process located in numerous locations and cultures throughout South Africa. Looking at Esterhuizen's films, it emerges that one of the ways in which Esterhuizen deals with issues of change and transformation, political or other, is located in his constructions of masculinity. This paper aims to critically discuss the notion and markers of masculinity as it is constructed in the cinema of Willie Esterhuizen, with reference to his films *Lipstiek Dipstiek* (1994), *Poena is Koning* ('Poena is King') (2007), *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat* ('Vaatie Falls Flat on his Ass') (2008) en *Stoute Boudjies* ('Naughty Bum') (2010). I will show how these films associate masculinity with a visible quest for sex, notions of control and social interactions characterised by the scatological notion of anality.²

Esterhuizen places the narrative focus on the male teenager or post-adolescent male. Similar to American celebrations and inversions of juvenile masculinity such as *Jackass* (2002) that '[present] a spectacle of emasculation that is also a reassertion of the masculine' (Brayton 2007:69), Esterhuizen's focus on the younger white male allows an exploration of the varieties of white anxiety and masculinities that attempt to establish themselves in a country that it perceives to be innately hostile to them. It is in lieu of this post-transitional socio-political hostility that Esterhuizen's young male characters seem to substitute pursuits of a political nature with a quest for sex. Even if these young white males cannot obtain employment, as they verbally state, they can get sex. Brayton (2007:58) explains that 'some white men have adopted a marginalised positionality in an effort to reclaim the tacit social privileges of being white, heterosexual and male'. One should be cautious to align with these characters' claims of disempowerment, as Vincent (2006:356) points out that traditional hegemonic white masculinity may in all likelihood continue to 'control the hegemonic center even in the transitional context'. Throughout his films, Esterhuizen still assigns power and control to the heterosexual male, privileging the traditional hegemonic centre of white hegemonic masculinity as a space of safety and assurance.

As Walker's (2005) study demonstrates, the political shifts of 1994 have called into question traditional roles designated to South African men. The 1990s have been said to foreground possible shifts

in gender politics; yet, ‘the later films examined [in the study] seek to recuperate an older story of masculinity rooted in mythology and a highly fetishized account of history’ (Bainbridge & Yates 2005:313). While Esterhuizen’s films do not fetishise history as much as revel in its relative absence, there is a resilience in gender related stereotypes that needs to be explored as part of the film’s story. Gender refers to ‘the socially constructed correlate of sex’ (Dozier 2005:298) and the performance of gender expresses sexuality through the body. Heterosexual intercourse, itself a gendered performance, can symbolically demonstrate ‘social inequalities between men and women’ (Dozier 2005:311). The representation of sexual intercourse on screen can indicate gendered power relations where gendered inequality is somewhat of a given in dominant mainstream cinema (see Hayward 2006:156-165). While Afrikaans cinema can be said to be traditionally conservative in terms of the representation of sex, Esterhuizen’s films, through their depictions of sex and sexuality, require investigation.³

Esterhuizen’s protagonists are all Afrikaans and white and verbalise their perceived social positions as politically disadvantaged. As Weis (2006:263) explains, ‘in changes that hit the former industrial proletariat (read: largely white men) the hardest, the remaking of class is tied in key and critical ways to issues that swirl fundamentally around masculinity, as well as the wages of whiteness’. Esterhuizen’s films construct whiteness as a burden, and not as a marker of middle class privilege. Indeed, the films at least superficially appeal to a sense of racial melancholia in two ways: the Afrikaner white male characters recognise the limitations of their whiteness, along with a betrayal of the ideal of whiteness (Straker 2004:409). Here, whiteness signifies ‘an experience of loss, and it is this experience that is associated with melancholia’ (Straker 2004:411) and ‘dislocation’, where social change (such as the transition from apartheid to democracy) result in ‘the previously unseen or denied being made forcibly visible’ (Steyn 2004:150), a process that implies the renegotiation of the social imaginary. In a South African context, as in many other contexts that have experienced an emergence from colonial fixation, whiteness is part of the social imaginary that needs to be interrogated and re-imagined. Esterhuizen’s Afrikaner white male protagonists seem to occupy a position of arrested political development as the melancholia following the loss of political power and the sense of dislocation that accompanied the political transition have not translated into an interrogation of their white male subject-position. Instead, Esterhuizen’s characters, as discussed below, rather appeal to a sense of victimhood. As Steyn (2004:148) explains, ‘the constellation of the victim has been highly salient in the discourses of Afrikaner whiteness’; indeed, Brayton (2007:58) explains that the white male both disavows and embraces victimhood. This sense of victimhood as verbally articulated by the protagonists in the selected films, reflects anxieties about racial and cultural identity, of being ‘[a]liens in a now foreign and disintegrating land’ (Steyn 2004:153, 156). The young white males in Esterhuizen’s film all perceive themselves as bearing the brunt of an unequal system of employment and search validation in the pursuit of sex instead.⁴ The films’ emphasis on sex, as I will show, centres on a tension between heteronormative behaviour and homosocial activity as exhibited by the characters. In Esterhuizen’s films, sex serves to confirm heteronormative masculinity at the expense of alternative forms of masculinity.

Measuring masculinity

With reference to the changed socio-political status of the Afrikaner male, Sonnekus (2013:36) explains:

Female, black and gay South African citizens benefit from unprecedented rights that and promote equality, but simultaneously place Afrikaner masculinity under immense strain to reassure itself (and others) of its legitimacy. Its main ideological pillars, whiteness and heterosexuality, are therefore constantly reiterated as monolithic and unimpressionable, ultimately prompting heightened levels of homophobia and racism.

Here Sonnekus foregrounds the compromised status of Afrikaner masculinity, which is renegotiated in light of major socio-political and cultural change. In their interrogation of the notion of masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:830) note that the much contested notion remains meaningful in discussions of power, violence, sexuality and social change. The authors note that ‘the combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities’ (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:846) remain the fundamental feature of the notion of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity exists on three levels. Firstly, the local level refers to families and immediate communities. Secondly, the regional level relates to constructions of masculinity on broader cultural and national levels. Finally, the global level refers to the masculinity construction in ‘transnational arenas such as world politics and transnational business and media’ (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:849). Esterhuizen’s films present masculinities that operate on a local (community-specific) and regional (cultural) level while constructing gender hierarchies in which heterosexual masculinity is hegemonic and homosexuality (or any suggestion thereof) is not considered masculine. In agreement with Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), this article supports the notion that there is no unitary masculinity but rather multiple masculinities. It follows that hegemonic masculinity can have various meanings in different discursive practices. While the hegemonic masculinity in Esterhuizen’s film is consistently characterised by the quest for sex, I will indicate the hegemonic masculinity in each Esterhuizen film.

Schippers (2007:86) suggests that masculinity is a social location as well as a set of practises and characteristics collectively understood as ‘masculine’. There are key cultural and social effects to these practises. Indeed, hegemonic masculinity, in Connell’s view, ‘legitimizes men’s domination over women as a group’, but, importantly, over subordinate masculinities as well (Schippers 2007:87). Specifically, as Schippers (2007:94) suggests, hegemonic masculinity is ‘*the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity*’ (emphasis in original). Garlick (2009:608) adds that hegemonic masculinity is further characterised by notions of control. Throughout the trials and tribulations of life, the male who is in control will navigate these challenges with considerable success to affirm a sense of control and agency. Speed (2010:829) explains that the testing of socio-cultural boundaries underpins certain traditions pertaining to the achieving manhood, where manhood is characterised by a sense of obtaining and exercising control.

Most teen comedies in Speed's (2010) discussion use the road trip trope to signify a transition not only from one space to and through others, but also of boyhood to manhood, with manhood suggesting the epitome of control (and, with that, a sense of an 'ending' to a process, as if the male-in-manhood has finished a project that requires no further attention).⁵ Although there are no road trips *per se* in Esterhuizen's cinema, the final light aircraft escape in *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat* and the trip to Durban for Hardus and Vaatjie in *Stoute Boudjies* qualify as moments that mark masculinity as the completion of a series of crucial decisions that lead to clear narrative resolution. In addition to teen comedies, Esterhuizen's films can also be described as 'lad flicks' (Hansen-Miller & Gill 2011), a combination of buddy films and romantic comedies about 'the trials and tribulations of a young man en men as they grow up and make their way in the world', a social negotiation in which masculinity is central (Hansen-Miller & Gill 2011:[sp]). These films, like Esterhuizen's, depict masculinities that are characterised by a sense of 'heterosexual domesticity' where the characters' middle class masculinity is constructed as 'fallible, damaged and distinctly unheroic' (Hansen-Miller & Gill 2011:[sp]). Strikingly, these 'lad flicks' foreground heterosexual male bonding, solidarity and homosociality, albeit accompanied by homophobic humour (Hansen-Miller & Gill 2011:[sp]). Indeed, Sonnekus (2013:27) observes that masculinity is occasionally signified through homophobia given that difference and denial historically indicate the pre-eminence of heteronormativity. With reference to homophobia, Clarkson (2006:200) refers to Kimmel's notion that homophobia is the fear that males will be revealed to not be 'real men', suggesting that homophobia is haunted by a sense or perception of inadequacy. Esterhuizen's films evidently borrow from various internationally recognised and recognisable western tropes, conventions and types to shape its narratives, and there is a definite homophobia to the four films discussed in this article.

In Esterhuizen's films, the male protagonists often (momentarily) straddle attempts at male control and an indulgence in behaviour that deviates from socially consensual norms. The latter seems to provide the male characters with opportunities for bonding as formative of a sense of kinship and solidarity. As Kiesling (2005:696) defines it, male solidarity refers to 'a given bond among men' according to which men 'want (and need) to do things with groups of other men, excluding women'. For Whitehead (cited by Kiesling 2005:698), masculine ontology concerns the masculine subject's search 'for an authentic self'. Notably, such a pursuit requires a constant engagement with 'performing acts recognised in cultural discourses as being associated with the self' (Kiesling 2005:698) and with being masculine, as one sees in Esterhuizen's films. The male characters use sex to solidify their subject position as one that is masculine and can be described as 'in control'.

Looking at the interactions between the male characters in the films concerned, and the emphasis on the homosocial dimensions thereof, it becomes clear how '[t]he discourse of homosociality is a desire to return to that golden age' of male friendship located in the early teenage years before the insertion of the female into male social life (Kiesling 2005:702). Esterhuizen's characters for most part succeed in returning to this 'golden age' of homosociality: since their manhood is asserted

through heteronormative sexual intercourse, they can afford to privilege homosocial relationships for much of the film.

I regularly refer to the notion of anality in the below discussion. The notion has enjoyed a privileged status due to its prominence in the psychology of Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson (Gardiner 2000:253). With reference to Shakespeare, Saunders (2004:150, 158) evokes the figure of Iago in *Othello* as demonstrating an anality which '[links] the concept of properly handled waste to ideals of personal conduct'; anality here marks the difference between civilization and barbarism. In cinema, Charlie Chaplin built a popular image of social resistance and non-conformity on a persona that utilised anality; as Gunning (2010:239) describes, 'Chaplin not only recalls the child who has not yet been thoroughly housebroken, but the "natural man" whose urges and bodily needs outweigh the demands of society and his own attempts at dignity'. Bodily functions here have socially subversive possibilities. Esterhuizen's films do not use anality as mechanism of subversion. As I will show, anality mutes homoerotic possibilities and confirms masculinity as heterosexual. For Gardiner (2000:252), it is an 'expulsive anality that ... is related to the ambiguities of men's roles and identities in consumer society'. Expulsive anality is often accompanied by an 'aggressive delight in 'grossness' where anality marks masculinity as 'explicitly childish' (Gardiner 2000:258). For the purposes of this article, anality refers to bodily functions of the anus and stomach as visible (and audible) in Esterhuizen's films. Here, anality is less concerned with ascribing a civilised-barbaric binary and more with maintaining a heterosexual-homosexual binary that is incongruous with contemporary conceptualisations of masculinity (as in Connell and Messerschmidt [2005]).

Lipstiek Dipstiek serves as a prelude to what I read as Esterhuizen's later films' emphasis on homosociality and even homoeroticism. This homoeroticism is repeatedly neutralised in favour of heteronormative masculinity. As Sonnekus (2013:32) asserts, gayness and hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity are irreconcilable.

Lipstiek Dipstiek (1994)

Esterhuizen's feature debut, *Lipstiek Dipstiek*, earned R6.3 million in 1994 at the South African box-office (Burger 2010:[sp]), the top-earning Afrikaans film for well over a decade. It introduces viewers to the young, virginal Poenie (Francois Coertze) who, on the threshold of marriage, burns his crotch with a welding rod and falls in lust with a blonde female psychologist. With Poenie, *Lipstiek* introduces viewers to the template for masculinity that echoes through Esterhuizen's entire cinematic oeuvre. Not only is Poenie's masculinity associated with the ability to resist inappropriate temptation, an indicator of control, Esterhuizen's construction of masculinity is also related to overt sexual behaviour where the definition of sex is limited to include only penetration. Intercourse, and nothing else, constitutes sex. Even when Poenie starts groping a nurse's breasts, his behaviour is seen as naïve and sweet, not sexually offensive. Finally, Poenie's quest for sex leads to a prolonged, gratuitous

climactic sex scene with the psychologist, thereby solidifying his masculinity. The climactic sex scene is followed by a brief final scene of the psychologist's former lover who is suddenly, and without any previous cues, revealed as gay.⁶ The affirmation of missionary hetero-sex, complete with soft lighting, Vaseline lense and soft-core instrumental soundtrack, is juxtaposed with the two male lovers meeting up outside their home in a mundane replication of earlier scenes with the psychologist and her fiancée meeting up. This suggestion that masculinity is visibly contrasted with sanitised, domesticated homosexuality is significant for the rest of Esterhuizen's *oeuvre* as the heterosexual standard (or default) for hegemonic masculinity is consistently confirmed.

Poenie is the forerunner for *Poena*, the sex-starved protagonist in *Poena is Koning*. Esterhuizen seemingly without irony refers to *Poena* as a 'humourous ethnic minority film' devoid of propaganda (Dercksen 2008:[sp]). *Poena is Koning* also foregrounds heterosexual sexual behaviour as indicative of masculinity.

Poena is Koning (2007)

Poena is Koning concerns two male best friends' attempts at losing their virginity by the time they leave school. As such, the film draws on an American narrative tradition manifest in films such as *Porky's* (Clark 1981) and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (Heckerling 1982). Like its American correlatives (see Speed 2010:825), *Poena* is also 'profitable, low-budget and formulaic'; however, where *Porky's* freely indulged a voyeuristic desire to reveal fully nude women to its viewers, *Poena is Koning* only has a few fleeting nude shots, none of them full frontal. Instead, *Poena* locates much of its sexual activity discursively in dialogue and symbolism, and not primarily in naked on-screen bodies. The verbalised sexual activity remains coarse and explicit throughout the film: 'although sexuality seems to be about bodies, it's not really about bodies. It is how bodily activity is reported in words' (Žižek cited by Fiennes 2006). The lack of an abundance of visual sexual activity should not be read to indicate an absence of sexuality but should serve to amplify the presence of sex and sexuality. The spoken word articulates and drives the quest for sex.

The pleasure of sex, whether visualised in the film or articulated in sexually explicit language, is foregrounded early in the film. *Poena's* high school friend Vaatjie (Andre Odendaal) mentions that he is 'addicted to pleasuring himself'. When one character hears that their attractive teacher, Juffrou (Perle van Schalkwyk), shaves her pubic area, he observes that if he does not lose his virginity soon, his 'balls will explode'. Such imagery is the basis of masculine sexual activity in the film: men are in constant pursuit of sexual release, running the risk that a failure in this regard will render them eunuchs. Many of the tensions introduced by *Lipstiek Dipstiek* are present. For example, the film suggests that a heterosexual virgin is possibly a 'moffie' ('faggot'). Only the act of deflowering will make the male's heterosexuality evident; without intercourse, such a man may possibly become homosexual, thereby compromising his masculinity.

The film's construction of masculinity becomes increasingly problematic. In one convoluted plot development, Poena is forced to hide a golden necklace by hanging it from his penis. This necklace becomes a key part in a transaction involving sexual rewards, where the necklace becomes a currency for sexual activity. This transactional quality to sexuality marks Esterhuizen's heterosexual masculinity as rooted in sexual conquest where sex and masculinity can be bought. Upon returning the golden necklace to its owner, Juffrou, grateful for the return of her property, seduces Poena. During foreplay, Juffrou's husband Vleis (Francois Coertze) arrives home unexpectedly, forcing a panicking Poena to flee naked over the apartment balcony.⁷ Poena finds refuge in a gay couple's next door apartment. Poena and one of the gay neighbours eventually listen to Juffrou and Vleis having sex – a naked heterosexual and effeminate homosexual bearing affirmative witness to the heteronormative sex act.

In addition to the quest for sex and the appreciation of the heteronormative sex act, there is an emphasis on anality in *Poena is Koning*. When Vaatjie farts in the exam venue, Poena is on hand to quickly explain that Vaatjie simply sneezes that way. As such, Vaatjie's public anality is completely normalised and there is no need to make an excuse for it. Soon after, both boys are in the headmaster's office, where he compares the ANC government's ineptitude to the experience of anal pain. Anality is here associated with discomfort and failure: a sexual failure but also a political impotence.⁸ Later in the film, Theunis van Rooyen (the late Andrew Thompson) is taken to hospital after he lodges stationery in his anus during a moment of sexual self-exploration. Here Esterhuizen has taken to humiliate those characters with an expressed anal activity or interest, especially insofar as it may be said to suggest latent homosexual experimentation.

Humiliation, especially of a socio-sexual nature, is key to reading the masculinity of these characters; as Speed (2010:827) explains, the vulgar teen comedy often focuses on punishing hedonistic behaviour, at least in the short term. For Esterhuizen, hedonistic behaviour associated with anal expulsion or insertion must be punished: Vaatjie goes to the principal's office, while Theunis is hospitalised.⁹ By now the film has clearly located masculinity as an identifiable difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality (the former possesses it while the latter lacks it) and its respective gendered performances, as well as in the frustrated attempts to obtain intercourse – with the understanding that eventually sex will be successfully obtained. If sex is obtained, the threat of homosexuality dissipates even as safe homosociality remains.

In addition, Esterhuizen's film identifies masculinity with the visibility of the penis. As in *Lipstiek Dipstiek*, male sexual arousal is visible and observed by female characters. In *Poena is Koning*, it is Poena's own mother who acknowledges her son's erection. The mother's affirmation of her son's penis is not simply an affirmation of masculinity, but also foregrounds female appreciation of the visible penis to counter the moments of anality and homosociality. For Hirdman (2007:160), the power of the heterosexual phallus is located in its invisible presence; yet, as 'one of the last Western cultural taboos with the ability to shock', the penis has become more visible in popular visual culture.¹⁰

The Lacanian conception of the phallus already contains ejaculate ‘as the constitutive metaphor for the phallicity of signification. The veiledness of the ejaculate as the vital flow reiterates the discursive imagery of heterosexual coitus which is presumed to impregnate meaning by “striking”, or fucking, the so-called passive, feminine signifiable’ (Cakirlar 2011:93). As Del Rosso (2011:705) explains, the external visibility of the penis makes it an immediate part of any discussion of masculinity in that the erect penis’s association with power and dominance comes into play.

The visible penis must be seen by other film characters; they must bear witness to its potency. ‘Phallus’, says Žižek (1989:254), ‘designates the juncture at which the radical externality of the body as independent of our will ... joins the pure interiority of our thought’.¹¹ The penis is the paradoxical combination of male control associated with masculinity and its failure. As Žižek (1999:471) explains, the ‘erection is one of the last remainders of authentic spontaneity, something that cannot be thoroughly mastered through rational-instrumental procedures’. A man who cannot produce an erection, this symbol of power raised by mere thought, is a manifest disappointment. Indeed, the ‘male’s potency functions as a sign that another symbolic dimension is active through him: the “phallus” designates the symbolic support which confers on [the] penis the dimension of proper potency’ (Žižek 1999:472). In this instance, castration anxiety is not about the loss of the penis but about the loss of male authority that accompanies its hoisted appearance. Esterhuizen must make his characters’ erections visible to the audience (which he does not explicitly visually do) by making it visible to other characters and so confirm their heteronormative masculinity: the visible penis is never witnessed by another male character, although male characters do comment on anal actions such as farting and cramps. The erect penis is restricted to the heterosexual domain. The heterosexual penis is made visible as homosexual connotations are muted.

In many American comedies, the homoerotic tension between male characters is often acknowledged and named, such as one character calling another ‘fag’ after a brief hug (Troyer & Marchiselli 2005:270). Troyer and Marchiselli (2005:273) point out that it is possible for ‘the precarious intimacy of homosocial relations [to topple] into the homoerotic’, citing how in *Dude, Where’s My Car?* (Leiner 2000), for example, ‘Chester’s knowledge about his friend’s gastronomic functions and the overt anality of the scene make clear the screenwriter’s intentions’. Halberstam (2011:58–59) refers to films such as *Dude, Where’s My Car?* as ‘male stupidity films’ featuring ‘witless white males’. Though I would be cautious to suggest some reductive link between anality and homosexuality, the positioning of anality in heteronormative narratives where masculinity is constructed as the domain of heterosexuality serves to elevate the heteronormative at the cost of any alternative, such as homosociality even. In fact, in *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat*, I read anality as formative of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity is accentuated once more.

Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat (2008)

Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat's main protagonist is the physically soft, bulbous and domesticated figure of Vaatjie. The name 'Vaatjie', a diminutive word for a wooden vat often filled with alcohol, is already suggestive of larger size. While Mosher (2005:61) correctly asserts that overweight males receive mostly 'limited narrative attention', Esterhuizen has given narrative prominence to such an individual. In this spin-off feature, Vaatjie and Theunis van Rooyen have exchanged their statuses as supporting characters to leading man and sidekick. Visibly absent from this film is the Poenie/Poena character, the male who most visibly conforms to normative ideas of physical appearance. Here the audience has no choice but to follow the character trajectory of the obese Vaatjie. Since fatness and flaccidity signify a failure of patriarchal potency (McPhail 2009:1026), Esterhuizen bases this film on a character already assigned to impotence, to failed masculinity.

Since the main character is a constantly eating, obese male, the film's emphasis on the anal is evident from the very start as the film opens with Vaatjie literally farting himself awake. Immediately after, he steps in dog faeces. Within minutes, his family has referred to him as 'poephol' (asshole) and 'dikgat' (fat ass). Blapsie, Vaatjie's sister, at one stage refers to him as a 'magneet vir kak' (shit magnet). These suggestions of anality are closely associated with disclosures of sexual excitation and a palpable homoerotic tension. Theunis communicates with Vaatjie via a computer video chat programme, stating: 'You're naked! Is this a bad time?', followed by Vaatjie's response that he has an 'enormous boner'. Here the presence of the erection is verbally stated, but not visually affirmed: while male characters may verbally describe their genitals and state of sexual excitation, only female characters bear affirmative witness to the penis. As with interactions between male and female characters in Esterhuizen's films, eroticism between male characters is limited to the discursive realm.

In the absence of the hegemonic masculinity exemplified by Poenia/Poena, Theunis and Vaatjie seem to pursue a relationship that leaves space for playful homoeroticism evident in the way the two males discuss their genitals and share their accounts of attempts at obtaining sex. Note that the type of male who engages in such a relationship is defined by failure: not only does Vaatjie struggle to contain his eating habits, he has already failed in a different way to control his body. Furthermore, it was Theunis who in the previous film had stationery lodged in his anus. But homoerotic desire is abject, rupturing and disrupting notions of normative masculinity (Brayton 2007:67); indeed, the white male in this context is depicted as 'an abject individual' (Brayton 2007:58).

Therefore, before this homoerotic playfulness threatens to disrupt narrative safety and comfort, Theunis and Vaatjie share in a striptease at the Lollipop Ranch. The important aspect here is the shared experience of the striptease as an opportunity for bonding, male solidarity and a demonstration of control; the male consumption of the female form has to occur in public to emphasise the visibility

of and validate the characters' interest in naked women. So invested in this project are Vaatjie and Theunis that they even cry together when the stripper does not remove her panties. The film spends more time on their crying than on the naked woman performing the striptease. Indeed, when Theunis goes on a date with Blapsie, Vaatjie's sister, Theunis is more concerned about Vaatjie's recent expulsion from cooking school than his date.

Again the homoerotic interest between Vaatjie and Theunis must be made safe by the explicit confirmation of heterosexual interests. Like Poenie and Poena before him, Theunis vehemently denies the fact that he is a virgin (the idea of sexual inactivity is anathema to dominant notions of masculinity) until Blapsie frames his virgin status as something positive in the sense that she would be honoured to participate in his deflowering. Later in the film, the post-coital Theunis smokes and drinks in bed to celebrate sexual conquest. This moment is echoed in *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat*, where Vaatjie (who is never shown smoking) lights a cigarette in the time honoured Hollywood fashion of celebrating triumphant intercourse after making a sperm bank donation. Seemingly whether a man has sex with a woman or with himself, it deserves to be celebrated.

Once Vaatjie is expelled from cooking school, he and Theunis visibly share in Vaatjie's grief by crying together and consoling one another. By now, these moments of male bonding and solidarity have been stripped of their threat to heteronormative masculinity as it is clear that both Vaatjie and Theunis are so invested in the female form that it brings them to tears. Men are allowed share emotional moments insofar as they occur in the pursuit of hetero-sex. Vaatjie visits a local video store looking for a French film that can teach him to speak French. Vaatjie explains that he is not looking for smut, but that he is not a 'moffie'. As in *Poena is Koning*, a male can only be one or the other: in the practice of masculinity, you are either an oversexed heterosexual male or a queer. In addition, there is again the usual emphasis on the protagonist's disabling whiteness, Max du Preez's (2003) 'pale native' who recognises and verbalises that history is against him. I read the quest for sex and its associations as a form of compensation for the repeated motif of white disenfranchisement in Esterhuizen's films.

It is, however, anality that is most emphasised in *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat*. Here, anality also enters the family sphere to serve as a prominent bond between father and son. Both Vaatjie and Wors, his father, find that their stomachs get upset in times of stress and excitement and have to empty their bowels as a manifestation of their excitement over Vaatjie's eventual personal triumph at being selected to go overseas for further training. Wors even references the mother, Mollie, into the practice of anality, stating that good news will cause Vaatjie's mother to 'shit herself'. Referring to scatological comedy in films such as *Austin Powers in Goldmember* (Roach 2002), Bonilla (2006:20) explains how the obese, hirsute male character Fat Bastard's 'faeces ... are for him proof positive of his continued being'. The act of defecation, and the tangibility of its product as well as the visibility of its by-products, is evidence of the male's existence and foregrounds anality as constitutive of masculinity in comedy.

Shared father-son anality eventually manifests in this film as a so-called 'Visagie photo': Vaatjie and Wors pull down their shorts, moon the nosy female neighbour and fart in her general direction. The neighbour topples from her balcony onto the lawn. Given her propensity for spying on Vaatjie's family, this scene makes it clear that the bodily manifest male will not be looked at; the male, in control of himself and his environment, does the looking. The suggestion of the 'photo' here suggests the flash of nudity and the impermanence – not the preservation – of the neighbour, whose last moment in the film is as humiliated female. Ostensibly this results in a closer bond between father and son as the two men celebrate the moment.

In the absence of the male protagonist's constant quest for sex, *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat* foregrounds the homoerotic bonds between certain characters, and emphasises the centrality of anality to Esterhuizen's idea of masculinity. The character of Vaatjie speaks, nearly (but not convincingly) subversively, to another form of masculinity: bear masculinity. As Hannen (2005:26) explains, '[b]ears reject the self-conscious, exaggerated masculinity of the gay leatherman in favor of a more "authentic" masculinity that frames the socio-physical appearance of this gay male as indicative of the heteronormative "regular guy"'. The bear can be seen as a gender performance that aligns with a straight-acting masculinity in opposition to stereotypical constructions of feminised homosexuality (Clarkson 2006:192). The bear is much like the heterosexual male in his daily pursuits, but he is gay. Consider Vaatjie and Theunis' moments of shared emotion: 'in staking their claim to gay masculinity, Bears challenge hegemonic assumptions about male sexuality by introducing what feminists have identified as an "ethic of care" (Gilligan 1982) into an objectified sexual culture perceived as alienating' (Hennen 2008:98). Contained in the trope of male bonding, solidarity and shared experience, Vaatjie is a considerate bear figure in the face of what I read as Theunis' precarious bisexuality. Vaatjie remains the most narratively prominent character though: as Coles (2007:31) explains, men who distance themselves from the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, men like Vaatjie, operate in other contexts where they are still in some way superior to other men (in this instance, Theunis). The more traditional heterosexual hegemonic male ideal reappears in *Stoute Boudjies*.

Stoute Boudjies (2010)

In *Stoute Boudjies*, the male characters' focus on sex becomes even more overt than before, with the main character, Hardus Vogel (which can be loosely translated as 'Hard Cock'). Again this oversexed white male complains that the job market is not open to him because of his whiteness. The only recourse to power and agency – to control – if not through work, is through sex. The film opens with Hardus and Vaatjie in a tent adrift on the ocean during a thunderstorm. In an inverted *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee 2005) moment, Hardus mentions that something's bothering him. A concerned Vaatjie replies: 'Your cock?' Soon after the characters verbally surmise that they are being punished for their primary sin: they masturbate too much. Schneider (2005:379) explains the

act of masturbation as ‘a sexual act that both waylays and encourages reproduction and qualifies in an admittedly thin sense as homosexual’. Schneider (2005:381) points to the paradox of masturbation where the act indicates entrance into puberty and pleasure while simultaneously signifying immaturity. He refers to the ‘up-and-down-penis’ as the flaccid-to-erect-to-flaccid penis that is both awesome and comical (Schneider 2005:391), as seen in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (Stoller 2008) where the male protagonist’s nakedness and flaccid penis humourously suggest psychological vulnerability and masculine fragility (see also Stephens 2007). While *Stoute Boudjies* avoids full frontal nudity, the film makes the relationship between male experiences of pleasure and shame palpable. As stated earlier, male hedonism is often punished through humiliation.

Masculinity is again located as the domain of the heterosexual, as Hardus remarks to romantic interest Petro (Angelique Pretorius) that ‘only a fag would say no to sex’ with her. Hardus more than compensates for the lack of the masculine ideal in *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat*. In fact, here again the father-son relationship is foregrounded. Whereas Vaatjie comes from a close-knit nuclear family, Hardus’s father has left his mother and taken a girlfriend. When Hardus’s quest for sex becomes visible, his mother remarks that he is ‘his father’s child’. Whether you have recently emerged from adolescence or whether you are middle aged, the quest for sex remains the key marker of masculinity for Esterhuizen. Unsurprisingly, the film shows us Hardus’s father receiving oral sex not once, but twice.

Troyer and Marchiselli (2005:276) discuss teen comedies as coming of age films with an emphasis on masculinity, where

everything must be a rejection of what is old or past (i.e. no longer fashionable) and an embrace of the new and the now, a rejection of abstract paternal authority. To bond with one another, and to reject the father and everything he has, the boys in [so-called] dude films attempt to incorporate and justify homosocial relationships with homoerotic desires; to reclaim for themselves the trajectory of masculinist, Western history and its projected futures.

Esterhuizen’s male protagonists do incorporate homosocial and homoerotic tension into their framework of masculinity and in addition incorporate the father as paternal authority: a model who is emulated in thought and behaviour, as manifest in the characters Poena, Vaatjie and Hardus.

Like his forebears, virginal Hardus vehemently denies his virginity, and is grateful for the sex he has with Petro, a sexologist. Hardus thanks Petro three times for the sex; far from an intimate moment, sex was a social transaction and rite of passage for the benefit of Hardus’ status as masculine. Garlick (2003:158) recounts how, for Lynne Segal, the practice of sexual intercourse ‘confirms a sense of ineptness and failure and that it is through sex that men experience their greatest uncertainties and dependence in relation to women’. The successful completion of the sex act gives Hardus reason to be less anxious about his masculinity, hence his gratitude to his partner. Again the emphasis is on penetration – no other sexual activity is framed as sexual. The penis – invisible but manifest in the dialogue – takes centre stage: when Petro’s boyfriend Os is chasing after him, Petro consoles

Hardus by informing him that he is better endowed than Os, who is a motorcycle aficionado. ‘The larger the bike, the smaller the wiener’, remarks Hardus, engaging with the colloquial view of a large motorcycle as a proxy for an inadequate sense of masculinity.

Later in the film, Os experiences what another character describes as a ‘a cramp in [his] asshole’, and the context of the scene is intriguing: while locating Os in the machismo of biker culture, complete with leather jackets and revving engines, the film shows him experiencing anal discomfort. The scene seems to have no other purpose other than to have Os pass gas painfully. In this scene, anality subdues Os as the overt heterosexual hegemonic masculine ideal by humiliating him. Žižek (2011:260) explains: ‘[I]n relation to another person’s body we know very well that he or she sweats, defecates and urinates, but we abstract from this in our daily relations – these features are not part of our fellow man.’ Yet Esterhuizen chooses to highlight the male body – and only the male body – as producer of waste. Masculinity is tied to bodily excess but also, in another chasm between the male protagonists and their female intercourse interests, to the potential for excess in other strata: the experience of *jouissance* or ejaculation. Far from only subduing the macho male as discussed above, I read this as a strategy to locate the masculine at the intersection of pleasure and pain (femininity, in its comparative absence, is not shown to have this range of physical possibilities.)

As seen in the above, *Poena*, *Vaatjie* and *Stoute Boudjies* foreground moments of anality as much as they do the quest for sex. I used anality throughout to include all references to bodily expulsion, excess, farting and also narrative references to the anus. Gardiner (2000:252) argues that ‘an expulsive anality is related to the ambiguities of men’s roles and identities in consumer society’; as Estherhuizen’s films demonstrate, masculinity is simultaneously demystified and constituted through anality. Anality can have certain positive, productive associations. Gardiner (2000:254) refers to Bakhtin, for whom ‘the democratic spirit of folk humor contests authority and turns established hierarchies on their heads by using imagery from what he calls the “material body lower stratum”’, which would include a “slinging of excrement” [signifying] destruction and debasement’ (Bakhtin cited by Gardiner 2000:254), yet retaining, as with urine, a notion of renewal and welfare (Gardiner 2000:254). Such a subversive dimension to anality is absent from Esterhuizen’s films, and possibilities of homoerotic tension are muted. Across the three films discussed in this article, the pattern of heteronormative hegemonic masculinity as the only acceptable masculinity is confirmed.

Conclusion

Esterhuizen pays little heed to traditional narrative models, eschewing the dominant Western three act narrative structure for a two act model where little regarding plot, especially the heteronormative element of the plot, is addressed. Instead, the first act of Esterhuizen’s films focus on maleness, masculinity and homosociality. The second act, as if cautious that the homosocial might become dominant, quickly and oddly inserts a heteronormative plot component into the narrative. Consider

how, in *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat*, the protagonist falls in love with the pretty video store clerk who appears in three scenes in the entire film and serves as the heteronormative salvation of the male. In Vaatjie's case, it is especially urgent to confirm the traditional masculinity and heterosexuality of the male protagonist as Vaatjie is not only obese, but also involved in domestic activities such as cooking and baking, which are traditionally associated with femininity.¹²

The characters of Poena, Vaatjie and Hardus in their performance of masculinity speak to the notion of the Lacanian fool, a figure who 'believes in his immediate identity with himself [and is] not capable of a dialectically mediated distance towards himself', much like a king takes his being-a-king as his immediate property 'and not as a symbolic mandate imposed on him by a network of intersubjective relations of which he is a part' (Žižek 1989:46). In elaboration, Žižek (1998:[sp]) explains that the fool is 'a simpleton ... who is allowed to tell the truth, precisely because the "performative power" (the socio-political efficiency) of his speech is suspended' (emphasis added). The characters' masculinity and their quest for sex are a given that simply needs to be confirmed, not deconstructed. Masculinity and the quest for sex occur simultaneously and in a complementary manner. The practice of social and self-control as well as the demonstration and near intuitive understanding of anality operate in the quest for sex as near-subversive markers that in the end confirm heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. Once sex is obtained and the narrative space has been made safe from threatening homosexualities, appropriate homosocial bonds are confirmed (*Stoute Boudjies*).¹³ While none of the protagonists in Esterhuizen's films self-identify as gay, many do exhibit homosocial and even homoerotic tendencies. However, the selected films continue to represent gay subjects by '[re-in-scribing] the dominance of heterosexuality' in often 'stereotypical form based on the assumption that everyone, or anyone worth representing, is straight' (Sonnekus 2009:41). Hegemonic masculinity is, again, exclusively heterosexual.

The characters Poena, Hardus and even Theunis all personally capture the moment preceding or following a sexual conquest on camera, as if preserving (and in one instance, sharing) these sexual experiences add further legitimacy to their masculinity. Significantly, these characters manage to bed their primary female interest halfway through the film already, and not only at the climax (with the exception of *Lipstiek Dipstiek*). The quest for heterosexual intercourse drives these characters: they do their best to obtain idealised female company, and eventually, after some trial and error, they succeed. With its emphasis on sexual intercourse, (lapsing) control, anality and homoerotic tension, the hegemonic heteronormative masculinity portrayed in Esterhuizen's films is exclusive and intolerant of alternative masculinities that threaten its stability. Overall, the quest for sex exists to narratively foil the homoerotic tensions in all of Esterhuizen's films.

NOTES

1. A preliminary version of this article was presented in paper form at the *Work/Force: South African Masculinities in the Media* conference, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, 13-14 September 2012.
2. I am not positing that there exists a binary opposite where one is either heterosexual or homosexual – gross categorisations that cannot endure in a consumerist environment – but that the male characters in Esterhuizen’s films pursue heteronormative masculinity as a mechanism to undermine possibilities of homoerotic tension between them. I am also not reading the strategic neutering of homoeroticism through the quest for sex as something that was intended by Esterhuizen, or that he personally condones one form of gendered performance over another. Instead, the narrative elements that constitute Esterhuizen’s consistent fictions (characters, plot, dialogue) guide my reading of the director’s films as a particularly problematic exploration of masculinity. To refer to Esterhuizen’s films as exploring masculinity would be problematic, since his approach to masculinity is affirmative rather than explorative.
3. South African censorship regulations during the apartheid era were notoriously strict and forbade the representation of a variety of themes and contents; see Tomaselli (1989:15-18; 25-28) on Jimmy Kruger’s Calvinist-inspired criticism of seminal Afrikaans films in the 1960s as well as South Africa’s less stringently Calvinist attitude in the 1980s.
4. On certain culture focused blogs, users refer to how ‘common’ Afrikaans movies can be, and Esterhuizen’s films, with its emphasis on sex and the body, are singled out as ‘common’ movies (Duskant Sutherland 2007:[sp]).
5. While the American teen comedy *American Pie* (Weitz 1999) is relevant to discussions of cinematic comedy tropes, conventions, sexuality and masculinity, as Stephens (2007:91) indicates, the film is closer in form and theme to *Bakgat!* (Pretorius 2008) than to Esterhuizen’s films and as such does not feature as a textual reference point in this article.
6. This moment would later be referenced in the first *Bakgat!* (Pretorius 2008) film when, after the male antagonist fails to complete the quest for sex, is shown to consider homosexuality as an alternative to heterosexual conquest. Esterhuizen’s idea that the male protagonist obtains sex while his competition does not evidently came to inscribe later Afrikaans comedy.
7. The name ‘Vleis’ translates as ‘meat’, and can be read to refer to this male character’s interest in consuming flesh (in the sense of nourishment as well as sexual pleasure). The name can also indicate a male with limited intelligence who is physically tough and no-nonsense, as in ‘meat head’.
8. Judith Halberstam (2011) discusses failure in a positive sense. It is failure that ‘allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods’ (Halberstam 2011:3). Failure preserves a sense of anarchy which interrupts the ‘supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers’ (Halberstam 2011:3). Esterhuizen’s films do not use failure in this productively subversive sense.

9. Foucault (1984) would explain that the hospital is a space to correct deviance, and that Theunis's hospitalisation is not simply to tend to him medically, but to normalise him, to retrain the body to perform certain actions and to avoid other, 'abnormal' ones.
10. Stephens (2007:89, 91, 92) suggests that the increased visibility of the penis resulted in the spectacularisation of the penis, and comments that the visible penis regularly indicate the perceived failure of the penis to measure up to the phallus, thereby compromising masculinity. In a South African context, such compromised masculinity made headline news with the painting *The Spear*. As Smith (2012:[sp]) reports, Brett Murray's painting positioned the visible penis as centrally visible, and as an entry point for discussing the political and sexual failures of South African president Jacob Zuma.
11. Žižek draws on Lacan to inform his conception of the phallus. For Lacan, the phallus is a signifier, an 'insignia', an 'organ without a body that I put on, which gets attached to my body, but never becomes an organic part' (Žižek 2006:34); in elaboration, the phallus is 'an excessive feature ... that generates the illusion of another hidden reality' (Žižek 2006:116).
12. Given how firmly established Judith Butler's ideas on gender performativity are, as primarily detailed in *Gender Trouble* (1990), I will not rehearse those ideas here due to limited space. Butler provides insight into the repetition of gender performances in establishing notions of gender, but this article's interest is less in the performance of gender or masculinity and more in how Esterhuizen's narratives neutralise homoerotic potentials by continually re-affirming hegemonic masculinity as heterosexual.
13. In this sense, *Vaatjie Sien Sy Gat* is admittedly the odd one out, given that the perpetually sexed-up Vaatjie here assumes a more domestic and less rambunctious role. The acquisition and practise of sexual intercourse is an afterthought to his culinary achievements. The homosocial motifs from the other Esterhuizen films are even more visible in the absence of the Poenie/Poena character.

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