

The Endorsement of Traditional Masculine Ideology by South African Navy Men: A Research Report

Jarred H. Martin¹ , and Charles H. Van Wijk²

Abstract

Although the study of masculinity/ies in South Africa has been a point of academic interest, especially since the fall of apartheid; there has been little focus on masculinity/ies peculiar to the South African military establishment. Where there has been, this has focused on the army environment and adopted a smaller-scale qualitative approach. In contrast, this study focuses on the South African Navy. The study provides a brief report of findings from the administration of a traditional masculine ideology scale with 1,185 South African navy men, between 19 and 59 years of age (mean of 25 years). Descriptive statistics, a multiple regression analysis, one-sample t-test, and one-way analysis of variance were run to analyze the data. Results demonstrated that this sample of navy men significantly endorsed constructs of self-sufficiency, physical toughness, and emotional restrictedness, as dimensions of traditional masculine ideology. Avoidance of femininity and risk-taking were not significantly endorsed.

Keywords

traditional masculine ideology, naval masculinity, navy men, military masculinity, South Africa

This research report briefly describes the endorsement of traditional ideologies of masculinity among South African Navy (SAN) men. Since the earliest moves toward a field of critical studies of men and masculinity/ies, a concerted area of analytic attention has been the hierarchically organized and traditionally hetero-masculinist

¹University of Pretoria, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, South Africa

²Institute for Maritime Medicine, Cape Town, South Africa

Corresponding Author:

Jarred H. Martin, Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria, Room 11-32, Humanities Building, Hatfield Campus, Pretoria, Gauteng Province 0002, South Africa.

Email: jarred.martin@up.ac.za

institutional culture of militaries (Higate, 2003). Military institutions have typically been found to cultivate and reproduce amongst both their (biologically) male and female members hetero-patriarchal belief systems which tend to retain socially conservative and often retrogressive attitudes about gender, masculinity, and sex/uality (Mankayi, 2008, 2010). Interestingly, however, within the focal thematic on military masculinity/ies, the study of naval masculinity/ies has yielded especially interesting analyzes about the ways in which traditionally normative and hegemonic masculinity/ies as well as more non-normative masculinity/ies are constructed in contradicting and sometimes conflicting ways (Barrett, 1996; Browne, 2012; Gilbert, 1976; Murphy, 1988; Zeeland, 1995).

It appears that naval masculinity/ies have received critical attention for the most part because of the way in which the unique operational environment of navies, namely, the maritime and subaquatic theatre of operations, have typically placed navy men (and, for a limited number of navies, women as well) in close confines and proximity with one another—often resulting in gendered, sexual(ized), and erotic experiences, relations, and power dynamics which require naval (hetero)masculinity to be (re)negotiated in ways which always already reaffirm it (Ward, 2015). Yet, despite these findings, historical and contemporary analyzes of naval masculinity/ies, of which many have often been smaller-scale qualitative contributions, have also found that most modern navies remain invested in the maintenance of peculiar forms of military masculine tradition/alism as well as gender binarism which are deeply rooted in sexist discourse and practice (Browne, 2012; Van Wijk, 2005; Van Wijk & Finchilescu, 2008; Veldtman, 2001).

Within South African critical literature on masculinity/ies, there is a significant paucity of work specifically focusing on the military and, in particular, the naval environment. This is surprising given not only the substantive growth in South Africa masculinity studies since the collapse of apartheid (Potgieter et al., 2017), but, also, because of the well-known role the apartheid-era military played in institutionally reproducing toxic forms of violent anti-Black (hetero)masculinity in defense of apartheid (Conway, 2008). The only publicly available work on South African naval masculinity can be found in Van Wijk's (2005) doctoral research which highlighted how SAN men still endorsed socially conservative beliefs about masculinity and, with this, resistance to the presence, equality, and command of women in naval operational work and life, especially in the wake of women (of all races) becoming fully integrated into the navy after apartheid (Bennett & Söderlund, 2008).

When considering what little larger-scale quantitative research exists on naval masculinity/ies, generally, and the complete paucity of an empirical literature on men and masculinity/ies within the SAN, in particular; the present study provides a descriptive report the findings of a survey which examined the degree to which 1,185 men serving in the SAN endorsed core attitudes around: risk taking, self-sufficiency, physical toughness, emotional restrictedness, and the avoidance of femininity, which together constitute those more normative values of traditional masculine ideology (Martin & Govender, 2011). In doing so, the researchers set out to survey: (1) the degrees to which SAN men endorsed core attitudes linked to more traditional and conventional

Table 1. Sample Composition by Socio-Demographic Markers (Age, Race, Rank, and Education).

Variable	Category	F	%	Variable	Category	F	%
Age	<21	71	6.0	Rank	Junior NCOs	582	49.1
	21–30	602	50.8		Senior NCOs	365	30.8
	31–40	292	24.6		Warrant officers	105	8.9
	41–50	148	12.5		Junior officers	68	5.7
	51–60	72	6.1		Senior officers	65	5.5
Race	African	605	51.1	Education	Grade 10–11	25	2.1
	“Colored”	317	26.8		Grade 12	854	72.1
	Indian	37	3.1		Vocational diploma	253	21.4
	Caucasian	214	18.1		Degree	53	4.5
	Not indicated	12	1.0				

dimensions of masculinity; and (2) whether any patterns of endorsement could be found within and between socio-demographic markers, in particular, age, race,¹ and level of formal education, as well as military status, such as, occupational class (or occupational specialty within the navy) and rank.

Method

Sample

This study provides a brief research report of the survey data collected in 2019 from a voluntary random sample of 1,185 male SAN Fleet personnel stationed in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Ages of the sample participants ranged from 19 to 59 (mean of 25 years), with the age range, as well as rank, race, and occupational groups of the sample being representative of composition of the broader Fleet (see Table 1). A total of 74% of the sample had a high/secondary school qualification, a further 21% had vocational diplomas, and 5% were in possession of a University-awarded bachelor’s degree. For security reasons, the socio-demographic marker of occupational class, and these respective sub-groupings, were not permitted to be published.

Measures

Socio-demographic questionnaire. A brief questionnaire that included personal demographic information about the participants was administered. The questions contained demographic information on age, race, rank, occupational class, and level of formal education. The necessity for considering these socio-demographic and military descriptors was considered important because of the ways in which differences in age, race, and level of formal education have been shown to influence greater and lesser degrees of adherence to traditional masculinity on the part of South African men (Ratele, 2016) and, moreover, how different occupational classes (such as, direct

combat occupations and combat-support occupations) and rank (or level of command) have been shown to inform the ways that military men endorse masculine role norms (Hinojosa, 2010).

Traditional masculine ideology. Data was collected by means of the traditional masculine ideology (TMI) scale. The TMI scale is designed to evaluate its respondents' adherence to traditional norms about masculinity (McCreary et al., 2005). The TMI scale is a brief five-item scale which succinctly measures the core theoretically derived social constructs of more traditional masculinity/ies, namely: risk taking, self-sufficiency, physical toughness, emotional restrictedness, and the avoidance of femininity.

Respondents to the TMI questionnaire rate their responses on a 4-point Likert-type scale from "not true at all" (1) to "very true" (4), for the first item; and "not at all important" (1) to "very important" (4), for the following four items. Scores on each of the items are averaged into a single index with higher scores indicating more traditional views of masculinity. The Cronbach alpha reliability for this scale has been reported at .75 (McCreary et al., 2005). When previously used with a sample of South African adolescent boys, a Cronbach's alpha of .551 was found (Martin & Govender, 2011). For the current study, a Cronbach's alpha of .623 and McDonald's omega of .632 were recorded.

Constituted by only five items, the TMI scale does present with limitations in its applied and deductive possibilities compared to other abridged versions of more popular battery-like masculinity scales which are both more psychometrically robust as well as multidimensional, such as, the 21-item Male Role Norms Inventory–Short Form (Levant et al., 2013). Despite this, the distinct advantage for the selection and use of this five-item scale, especially within the operational environment of the SAN Fleet, is that it requires very little time to administer, complete and score—an important practical consideration given the limited time afforded to the researchers to execute this survey owing to the operational demands of daily work schedules in the SAN. In addition, the wording of each item is concise and semantically accessible—a vital consideration in South Africa, where English (although the official language of the SAN) is not the primary language for the majority of the population nor SAN members.

Procedures

The data collected through the TMI scale was analyzed in conjunction with responses to five demographic descriptors (age; race; rank; occupational class; and level of formal education) supplied by each respondent. The statistical program SPSS (version 25 for Windows) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations), were used to analyze the data and a series of other tests, including multiple regression analysis, one-sample *t*-tests, and one-way analysis of variance, were conducted to examine the relative contribution (or not) of different socio-demographics on the overall endorsement of traditional masculine ideology.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for All TMI Scale Items and the TMI Mean Index Score.

Scale item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Risk taking	2.15	1.17
Self sufficiency	3.08	0.83
Physical toughness	3.14	0.80
Emotional restrictedness	2.91	0.93
Avoidance of femininity	2.61	0.98
TMI mean index score	2.78	0.60

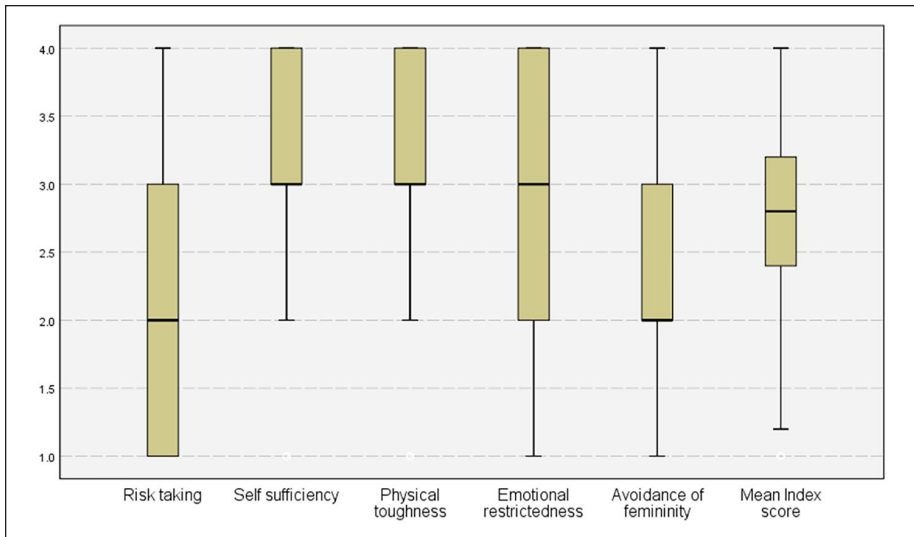


Figure 1. Box and whisker plot for all TMI items and the TMI mean index score.

Prior to the commencement of this study, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Pretoria’s Humanities Research Ethics Committee (reference: HUM043/0619).

Results

Endorsement of the five TMI scale items as well as the total TMI index is presented in Table 2 and Figure 1.

This sample reported significantly stronger endorsement of TMI when compared to McCreary et al. (2005) original sample of college students ($t=28.648, p < .001$, mean difference 0.5 points), and the scale’s theoretical mid-point ($t=16.011, p < .001$). The TMI total index recorded for this sample ($M=2.78, SD=0.60$) is also comparable to

Table 3. One Sample *T*-tests using the Theoretical Mid-point of 2.5.

Scale item	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean difference
Risk taking	-10.257	<.001	0.35
Self sufficiency	24.239	<.001	0.58
Physical toughness	27.588	<.001	0.64
Emotional restrictedness	15.365	<.001	0.41
Avoidance of femininity	3.767	<.05	0.11

Table 4. One-Way Analysis of Variance for Socio-demographic markers (Age, Race, Rank, Education, and Occupational Class) With TMI Mean Index Score.

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Age categories	48.118	4, 1,180	.000	.140
Race categories	3.948	4, 1,180	.003	.013
Rank categories	23.909	4, 1,180	.000	.075
Educational categories	8.071	4, 1,180	.000	.020
Occupational categories	11.486	4, 1,180	.000	.089

the TMI total index recorded in Martin and Govender's (2011) research with South African adolescent boys ($M=2.706$, $SD=0.515$, $p < .05$).

Interestingly, risk-taking was not endorsed as important (with mean scores significantly below the theoretical mid-point), while self-sufficiency, physical toughness, and emotional restrictedness were more strongly endorsed (with mean scores significantly above the mid-point). Avoidance of femininity was somewhat endorsed. Statistical significance of single sample *t*-tests are reported in Table 3.

Multiple regression analysis using the biographic variables as regressors revealed that the regression was a rather poor fit ($R^2_{adj} = 8\%$), and although the overall relationship was significant ($F_{5,1179} = 20.956$, $p < .01$), these variables contributed relatively little (all $\beta < 1.9$) to variance.

Table 4 reports the results for the one-way analysis of variance with each socio-demographic marker and the TMI mean index score and Sheffe's post hoc test. While all the results are statistically significant, the effect sizes are relatively small, with the most appropriate inference from this being that the demographic differences in this sample of SAN men were likely not meaningful.

Discussion and Conclusion

Notable in the results of the present study was the relatively little effect of socio-demographic factors on influencing participants' endorsement of TMI. With the age, race, rank, occupational class, and level of formal education of the study respondents' not playing a significant role in informing their degree of TMI endorsement, a

tentative conclusion to be drawn here could be the role played by other factors not measured in this study, especially given that this sample of SAN men still strongly endorsed TMI. When considering the broader body of literature on military masculinity/ies, the institutional influence of military culture cannot be negated (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978). It has long been known that military organizations employ a pervasive and lifelong system of both explicit and implicit socialization which ingrains and imbeds institutionally peculiar ways of thinking and behaving for military work and life (Guimond, 1995). It is through these very same processes that military organizations have, for the most part, also ensured the trans-historical transmission of ideologies, traditions, and practices which institutionally configure gender in general, and masculinity in particular, in a way which has reproduced militaries as both conservative and exclusionary institutions, especially in regards to gender and sexuality (Owens, 2010). If indeed the processes of naval acculturation within the SAN are determinative of this sample's attitudes toward TMI, regardless of their age, ethnic, occupational and other differences, this would further reaffirm the powerful homogenizing effects of military socialization which reproduces, in this instance, South African navy men, with like-minded values and attitudes concerning masculinity.

Another surprising finding was the low endorsement of risk-taking, as a dimension of TMI. Not only have military men's attitudes toward risk-taking often been a focus of academic study (Börjesson et al., 2015); but, moreover, the peculiar and dynamic relationship between risk-taking and masculinity for military men has become a particular area of scholarly attention (Mankayi & Naidoo, 2011). The interest in risk-taking within military populations has often been motivated by two competing demands: on the one hand, the demand of operational necessity, and on the other hand, the demand for adaptive and appropriate decision-making (Breivik et al., 2019). Thus, while more flexible attitudes toward risk-taking are often required and encouraged within military personnel, especially those personnel engaged in high-risk operational and combat-active work (Sicard et al., 2001), reckless or ill-considered decision-making which results in inappropriate and unnecessary risk is discouraged in equal measure (Toft & Imlay, 2007). In this regard, scholars of military masculinity/ies have sought to understand how particular attitudes and expressions of masculinity within militaries may work to predispose military men to both more or less adaptive patterns of risk-taking and decision-making (Hinojosa, 2010). This becomes salient given that critical studies of men and masculinity have pointed to masculine bravado and machismo as typically underpinning unhealthy and deleterious modes of risk-taking by men (Connell, 1995). The low endorsement of risk-taking by this sample of SAN men therefore stands in contrast to existing studies where risk-taking has been endorsed as an important aspect of military masculinity by men from militaries based off the African continent (Woodward, 2000), from the African continent (Nkosi, 1998), as well as from male soldiers in the South African Army (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007). In addition, the low endorsement of risk-taking by this sample of South African men also contrasts with existing literature about risk-taking being an especially problematic but typically core constituent of hegemonic versions of masculinity in South Africa (Ratele, 2008).

Lastly, one of the especially interesting findings from the present study was the lower endorsement of the Avoidance of Femininity item on the TMI scale. Such a finding contrasts with existing studies which have held that the avoidance of femininity (also described as anti-femininity) often acts as a cornerstone for the constitution of naval masculinity (Barrett, 1996; Truesdale, 1998), as well as those more traditional and hegemonic versions of South African masculinity (Luyt, 2003). Elsewhere it has been argued that it is the avoidance of femininity which has come to underwrite military masculinity and, in so doing, prop up both historical and contemporary gendered exclusionary practices to having women, gay men, and trans-people serve in all aspects of military and operational work and life (Van Gilder, 2019).

The low endorsement of the avoidance of femininity amongst SAN men in this sample may however point to two relatively unique factors within the modern SAN. First, are the gender-integrated policy directives which guide the organizational development of the SAN (South African Navy, 2001, 2003, 2006). After the fall apartheid and, with this, the reorganizing of the South African military under a new regime informed by democratic constitutionalism and equality for all, women were, for the first time in South Africa's naval history, not only actively recruited into naval service, but, moreover, permitted access to training, staffing, and deployment in all operational lines of work, and promotion throughout the rank and command structure of the SAN. While this may make the SAN, at least in terms of its personnel profile, one of the most gender-representative navies, especially on the African continent (Seegers & Taylor, 2008); the employment/deployment of women alone should not be taken as an indication of a broader organizational shift toward more progressive gender(ed) belief systems within the SAN.

Second, and more practically, the building of a more gender-integrated SAN over the past 20 years has been coupled with the institutionalization of gender-inclusivity training which typically features as a formal component of naval education and career development programs for all naval personnel. With that said, the move toward a gender-inclusive SAN may not necessarily mean that women serving in the SAN still do not experience resistances to their service onboard vessels, their staffing in certain occupational lines of naval work, or their command. In this regard, Mankayi (2006) has found that male soldiers within the South African Army still construct femininity, broadly, and female commanders, specifically, as somehow deleterious to operational effectivity.

Limitations and Future Directions

A primary limitation of the present study was the TMI scale. While this scale provides an efficient and concise measure of those norms which typically cohere within more traditional constructions of masculinity, it does so through a research participant's response to only five items which are considered theoretically consistent with more traditional masculinity/ies (Martin & Govender, 2011). In this regard, the TMI, as a quantitative survey research tool, lacks the kind of extensive actuarial value and richness which is provided in more commonly used multi-item and multi-(sub)scale measures of masculinity, such as: the 57-item Male Role Norms Scale (Thompson &

Pleck, 1986); the 58-item Male Role Norms Inventory (Levant et al., 1992); and the 93-item Conformity to Male Norms Inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003). While the present research report sought to provide an initial albeit brief empirical picture of masculinity in the SAN, future work would need to broaden and deepen this picture through the use of more comprehensive masculinity measures.

An additional limitation is how the truncated TMI scale delimits the quantitative measurement and, with this, analytical horizons of traditional masculinity to those more pejorative and retrogressive dimensions of traditional masculinity. However, what has become increasingly evident from more contemporary approaches to the quantitative study of masculinity is that even traditional forms of masculinity are constituted through a plurality of influences which can engender more constructive, positive, and progressive attitudes which can become linked to masculinity (Levant, 2008), such as, in the military environment, resilience, camaraderie, and adventurism. Future research with the use of more expansive and multidimensional scales, such as, Luyt's (2005) Male Attitude Norms Inventory-II, which has demonstrated sound psychometric validity and reliability, and was also designed for use within the South African context, may be able to provide a more comprehensive data picture that does not reduce the complex and adaptive dimensions of naval masculinity/ies peculiar to South African men in the Navy to a singular or homogenous caricature of military masculinity/ies.

A final consideration for future directions of this research could be a more expansive approach to data collection which diversifies the sample through the inclusion of men serving in other arms of service within the South African military, such as, the army and air force. Not only would this enhance the relative generalizability of such research to the broader population of South African military men, but, moreover, it would allow for interesting cross-comparisons between different arms of military service, with the aim of exploring any qualitative differences in the institutional construction and socialization of masculinity/ies between and within the unique subcultures and operational theatres of the army, air force, and navy.

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ORCID iD

Jarred H. Martin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7406-147X>

Note

1. It is worth mentioning that despite employing the commonly used, although contested demographic categories of "race" in South Africa, namely, African, "Colored", Indian, and

Caucasian (or “White”); much of the literature on South African masculinity/ies has pointedly highlighted how masculinity/ies are significantly circumscribed by the peculiar ethno-cultural, historical and material forces which underwrite “race” and racialized subjectivity in South Africa (Ratele, 2016).

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Author Biographies

Jarred H. Martin is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria (UP) and heads the professional training programme in Clinical Psychology at UP. His primary fields of research and publication are in Gender and Sexuality Studies and Critical Studies of Men and Masculinity/ies. Before entering academia, Dr Martin was a member of the South African National Defence Force, where he served in a variety of operational theatres both at home and abroad.

Charles H. Van Wijk heads the Department of Psychology at the Institute for Maritime Medicine. His current research interests are related to occupational mental health surveillance.