‘Becoming manly’: white South African defence force veterans negotiating masculinity

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Abstract

This study examines how white South African men reflect on their experiences of being and becoming army veterans, while negotiating masculinity. In the context of ‘high apartheid’, Afrikaner domination of the socio-political landscape, ethnic and racialised inequalities, the veterans negotiated being white English-speaking men through reflecting on, critiquing and disassociating from military masculinity. An English South African masculinity was upheld by distancing from Afrikaner domination and values, violence and compulsory heterosexuality. These findings suggest that while a military masculinity offered men a powerful template to assert their authority as white men, such power was nuanced by English South Africans’ relative political impotence, the domination of Afrikaans as a language and illustrates the heterogeneity in the experience of white veteran masculinity under apartheid. At the same time, however, white English veterans were complicit in and benefitted from whiteness and the power accrued in the country by virtue of race, class and history of British colonialism. We argue that the experience of being and becoming conscripts and the reflection on military masculinity directs attention to the ways in which broader social and political contexts have effects for the shaping of masculinity reflecting hierarchies of power and fluidity.

Keywords: Veterans; hegemonic masculinity; apartheid; resistance; military; South Africa

Introduction

The military is a key site for the making of masculinity (Christensen & Kyed, 2022; Spector-Mersel & Gilbar, 2021). Military and masculinity studies draw attention to the ways in which hegemonic masculine ideals, including physical and mental toughness, lack of emotions and violence, are sutured into military life while denouncing other patterns of masculinity (Belkin & Canaday, 2010; Hinojosa, 2010; Martin & Van Wijk, 2021; Myrttinen, Khattab, & Naujoks, 2017). This image of a militarised masculine ideal amplifies what ‘*real*’ military men do and is key to the performance of manhood. Evidence suggests military resentment towards men who do not approximate the expectations of an idealised hegemonic masculinity where heterosexuality is both

assumed and expected (Belkin & Canaday, 2010; Conway, 2004). Moreover, men who are anti-war show resistance or do not wish to serve the military due to other career aspirations are generally categorised as cowards (Stough-Hunter & Hart, 2015). Along with the construction of an ideal masculinity, these hegemonic masculine ideals within militarised settings have also been recognised as a necessary political tool to maintain state power and control (Mankayi, 2010).

Colonialism frequently employed these hegemonic masculine ideals within its structures, as they served to reinforce the dominance of colonial powers and facilitate the subjugation of indigenous populations. Colonial powers formulated their own concepts of masculinity, frequently in opposition to marginalised or colonised masculinities (Nagel, 1998; Slootmaeckers, 2019). Nagel (1998) views masculinity as a performative identity noting that male bodies can be manipulated to advance and legitimise colonial agendas, particularly in justifying militarism and colonialism. Nagel (1998) introduces the idea of 'colonial masculinity', which serves as a means to legitimise imperial rule and rationalise the utilisation of male bodies as tools for colonial control. This concept broadens the definition of masculinity, extending it beyond the national context to encompass the colonial or imperial framework.

In South Africa, the context of this study, the enforcement of a hegemonic militarised masculinity formed the basis of a highly authoritarian military force, namely the South African Defence Force (SADF) that was operative during the apartheid period. A compelling example of how male bodies were strategically utilised as focal points in colonial projects can be seen in the militarised masculinity under apartheid. This historical context illustrates how male bodies were strategically employed to enforce and perpetuate racial segregation and control.

A militarised masculine ideal was necessary to uphold the apartheid regime that privileged white supremacy (Symons, 2020). Masculinity operates through the repudiation of femininity, and this was a common feature of military masculinities which were deeply stratified not only on the basis of race but along structures of gender, sexuality and ethnicity where white Afrikaner masculinity was deemed hegemonic (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007).

Scholars attest to the relevance of 'whiteness' as an identity, and the complex interplay between masculinity, sexuality and race within the SADF (Gevisser, 2021; Van der Merwe, 2006). For example, in his film, 'Moffie' and Me (Van der Merwe, 2006), as well as Gevisser (2021), bring forth a range of personal stories, that draws on whiteness and sexuality through which homophobic and abusive forms of masculinity became entangled within a militarised masculinity in South Africa. In the novel Moffie, Van der Merwe (2006) presents a personal account of the harsh realities experienced by a young white male gay conscript, Nicholas van der Swart. Within this militarised environment, the protaganist grapples with his own sexual identity and the repercussions of being gay in a society characterised by deep conservatism, Christian fundamentalism and overt homophobia. Militarised masculinity was thus complexly entwined with securing a heteronormative, white and Christian identity. However, militarised masculinity is never uniform. Evidence suggests that veterans who were forced into military conscription and who later developed combat-related post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS)show how masculinity is never all encompassing but open to change (Bulmer & Eichler, 2017). In post-apartheid South Africa, veterans

who once served an autocratic military still carry the traumatic experiences of having been forced into military conscription (Gibson, 2010).

This article examines how white male SADF veterans reflect on their experiences through political transformations until the end of apartheid in 1994 and the ways that these experiences are entangled with the negotiation of masculinity. Drawing from semi-structured in-depth interviews with four white male veterans aged between 51 and 65 years, we highlight the practices of military veterans prior to, during and after their time in the military. In particular, we demonstrate how constructions of masculinity within the SADF were negotiated against an Afrikaner-rooted culture that dominated the state during apartheid. First, we give attention to an Afrikaner ethos that manifested itself within an authoritarian society that sought to prepare boys for life in the military as adult men. Second, we examine how masculinity operated and was negotiated during conscription and third, how the veterans perceived themselves as white men in a post-apartheid South Africa. Our aim is to show how veterans in reflecting on their experiences through forced conscription also reflect on the changes in masculinity as they (re)negotiate their current identities and values.

Militarisation and hegemonic masculinity in context

The context of our study is apartheid where the primary allegiance of the military was to uphold domination based on white supremacy. The role of the military was thus to enforce and perpetuate an ideal version of racialised manhood in an attempt to maintain political power (Morrell, Jewkes, & Lindegger, 2012). But whiteness is far from uniform. While the SADF reflected colonial/apartheid patriarchal ideals mobilised around white supremacy, the military environment, like the rest of white South Africa, functioned within a hierarchal system of whiteness where a state dominated Afrikaner-influenced ideology challenged English values, language and the British.

South Africa's history around British colonialism and the long-standing conflict for power between the white British colonialists and white Afrikaners meant that negotiating white masculinity in the SADF was complex. The struggle for power between the British and white Afrikaners is saliently reflected in Boer War in South Africa between 1899 and 1902. For the British, the presence of Afrikaners was perceived as an obstacle to colonialism and capitalist accumulation, particularly in the context of the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa. Politically, Afrikaners resisted the British seizure and control over the land and the British appetite for resources. Moreover, conflict arose between British cultural norms and language and Afrikaner values, underpinned by Calvinistic doctrines. By 1902, the British triumphed ending hostilities between the British and Afrikaners although the remnants of the war had deep seated effects for understanding the complex and at times hostile relations between these two white ethnic groups (Conway, 2008). In 1948, the Afrikaners, under the National Party, gained power and with this came the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. To understand these complexities and the shift in power relations that SADF veterans in this study negotiated, we draw on hegemonic masculinity as a lens to demonstrate how ideologies of militarised masculinity empowered some men while subordinating others and also reflect on the changing patterns of masculinity.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) can be understood as a version of masculinity governed by a set of established principals that is legitimised through

the subordination of females and other men who do not conform to the prescribed masculine ideal. Hegemonic masculinity, as further proposed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), is not fixed but multiple and is embedded within surrounding socio-cultural and political milieus and open to change. In South Africa, historical legacies have effects on how masculinity is produced and changes and what may be considered as ideal in one context may not be the same as another (Hearn, 2011). Morrell (2020) and others (Jewkes et al., 2015) in South Africa have shown how masculinity can be useful in analysing male violence within a broader socio-political context. In contesting a unified notion of masculinity, Morrell (2001) illustrates the heterogeneity in the country by black, African and white masculinities which are stratified by race, class gender, ethnicity and sexuality and shaped by colonial and apartheid legacies. In making a strong case for fluidity in the experience of manhood, Morrell (2001) shows how black and African masculinities can be differentiated by racialised, geographical and cultural dynamics. For instance, Morrell (2001) refers to African masculinity to illustrate the assemblage of land, chieftainship, and customary practices that shape men's lives. In contrast, black masculinity elucidates the aggregation of urban livelihoods, precarity, loss of family and racialised inequalities to account for male weakness and violence – a term also used by Langa (2020) in his study of black men in a township setting in the country. In keeping with the focus of this study, we draw specifically on white masculinity as the privileged ruling class masculinity during apartheid.

Contesting the singularity of meaning around white masculinity in South Africa, scholars attest to the complex ways through which power, privilege and change are negotiated in relation to Afrikaner masculinity and English masculinity (Morrell, 2001; Falkof & Cashman-Brown, 2020). The historical contestation for land and power between English and Dutch settlers, the distinct language and cultural dynamics have produced tensions between Afrikaner and English masculinity. Under apartheid, the Afrikaans language was a powerful marker of political, cultural and historical identity. Afrikaner men yielded and benefitted from these positions of power which was actively contested. Conversely, English, with its colonial roots, represented a different cultural and linguistic tradition and through which benefits including race and economic power also accrued (Falkof & Cashman-Brown, 2020). Apartheid cemented white Afrikaner masculinity as hegemonic and yet white men, including the English accrued economic and gendered power through the political hegemony of white Afrikaners. Thus, despite contesting Afrikaner political hegemony, while being politically impotent, white English masculinity under apartheid thrived and benefited from the history of colonialism, race and class privilege as well as the reinforcement of male power.

As noted, hegemonic masculinity as a framework is useful in drawing attention to the power relations that exist within military settings (Duncanson, 2015; Hinojosa, 2010). In this study, the historical legacies of the SADF embedded within Afrikaner hegemony and conservatism remain key to understanding SADF veterans' constructions of masculinity. Afrikaner conservatism prioritised strict moral conduct, social hierarchy and principals that reflected 'patriarchy, puritanism and authoritarianism' (Symons, 2020, p. 3). Its hegemonic culture shaped the standards of appropriate conduct not only within broader apartheid South Africa but the behaviour and conduct of men in the SADF. In the SADF, such conduct valorised 'risk-taking, self-discipline, physical toughness and/or muscular development, aggression, violence, emotional control, and overt heterosexual desire' (Hinojosa, 2010, p. 179). Emphasis on uniformity in relation

to decorum, appearance, bodily postures and etiquette were integral to Afrikaner manhood. These expectations of an idealised masculinity in the SADF mirrored traditional ideals of hegemonic masculinities, enabling some men to assert power against those who did not conform (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

According to Connell (1995) 'hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power' (p. 77). Hence, the notion of an Afrikaner-influenced militarised masculinity legitimately instigated a social obligation to military conscription as the only appropriate medium in which white men could be recognised as ideally masculine, thereby reinforcing the notion that the claim to a true masculine status required military experience (Conway, 2012). The militarised values of the SADF permeated socio-cultural norms, white familial structures and social institutions such as schools and churches, where ideals of hegemonic masculinity were replicated in preparing young white boys for military conscription (Symons, 2020). For broader white South African society, albeit with resistance, entry into military conscription was not only considered a privilege and civic responsibility but an entrance into manhood (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007). Military conscription was the first step into the SADF, and completion was deemed as necessary in fulfilling the goal of becoming a fully-fledged military soldier (Conway, 2012). Men who completed conscription in society and served the SADF were accorded a respectable status and perceived as the ideal man.

Under apartheid, schools served as agents of militarisation exposing young white boys to cadet programmes that supported mental and physical development, underlined by gendered and racialised structures of power (Conway, 2012). Schooling institutions operated within a Christian National Education (CNE) system. Central to Calvinist principles as emphasised by the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church was the notion of Boers (Afrikaners) as chosen citizens of the state who were expected to mobilise against and uphold political power against the black majority. The 'black fear' and the political threat posed by anti-apartheid movements infiltrated schooling systems, fuelling the socio-political obligation of upholding a white supremacy by training for the defence force (Symons, 2020).

Hegemonic masculinity is premised upon the subordination of the feminine and women. It is essential to recognise that hegemonic masculinity extends beyond the subordination of the feminine and encompasses marginalised subject positions, including class and race (Connell, 1995). In the context of our research, the concept of 'whiteness' as an identity and its intersection with race and class plays a pivotal role in shaping the construction of militarised masculinities. Whiteness was closely associated with power, control and the enforcement of apartheid policies which perpetuated the idea of black men and homosexual as the 'other' marked by racial subordination, disenfranchisement and systematic oppression (Sasson-Levy, 2017). Irrespective of their linguistic and cultural affiliations, white men were positioned within this racial hierarchy and their experiences of militarised masculinity were inherently entwined with their racial identity. Herein, it is crucial to recognise that within the category of whiteness, hierarchies existed. For instance, white men from diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds had distinct experiences within the military, reflecting the broader complexities of class distinctions in South African society. At the core of these distinctions was the privileged Afrikaner position. While our research primarily centres on white masculinity, it is essential to acknowledge that the

construction of white hegemonic masculinity within militarised settings operated within a system that simultaneously shaped the ways in which masculinity was expressed and experienced among black men. In this system, the construction of white hegemonic masculinity was intricately tied to the perception of black masculinity as a threat. Under the apartheid system, violence was systematically used as a tool of control and subjugation against black men in order to maintain the dominance of white South Africans. The state apparatus and security forces were heavily involved in perpetuating violence, from police brutality to state-sanctioned acts of violence. This violence served to enforce racial segregation, maintain the racial hierarchy and suppress any form of resistance (Mankayi, 2010). The SADF perceived homosexuality as a threat to the social and religious order. A homophobic environment, not just in the military but within broader societal structures, was deemed to be a moral obligation and duty to preserve the sanctity of heterosexuality and protect young white men from homosexuality (Mankayi & Naidoo, 2011). The SADF prohibited gay men from becoming members of the permanent defence force but being gay was accompanied by harsh treatment in the form of 'aversion shock therapy' and 'chemical castration' amongst other harsh abuses Belkin & Canaday, 2010, pp. 1–3). For men who were seen as effeminate, the pressure to conform to masculine ideals was almost unavoidable (Conway, 2004). In addition, men who were non-conforming, expressing alternate forms of sexuality were also resented in white Christian-dominated society and barred from alternate career opportunities (Hinojosa, 2010).

Expanding the theoretical framework beyond the conventional focus on hegemonic masculinity within militarised settings, our analysis also incorporates insights that speak to issues of affect, memory, trauma, progressive masculinity and how these intersect in shaping white SADF veterans' experiences of masculinity in contemporary South Africa. Engaging with Ahmed's (2014, p. 12) concept of 'affect', we consider SADF veterans experiences of masculinity as ingrained in discourses, bodies, objects and spaces which come to shape their emotions. Ahmed (2004) draws on the concept of 'affective economies' which refers to the intricate web of emotions, desires and feelings that circulate within social spaces and influence individual and collective experiences. In the context of understanding SADF veterans' constructions of a militarised masculinity, affective economies unlock how emotions and affective states play a central role in shaping their experiences and identities. Affective economies may help us grasp how the emotions associated with militarised masculinity, such as fear, camaraderie, trauma and pride, are produced, exchanged and regulated within the military environment and beyond. By exploring how these affective economies operate, we are able to explore how SADF veterans construct their militarised masculinity and how their emotional experiences are intertwined with the broader social and cultural forces that shape their identities as former soldiers as we shall see such shifts later in the analysis.

Moreover, Ahmed's (2014) notion of 'emotional stickiness' which suggests that emotions and affects are not easily shed but rather stick to individuals and influence their subsequent actions and interactions, we suggest an understanding of a militarised masculinity as 'sticky'. In relation to this study, these emotional norms, cultivated during military service, continue to influence veterans in their post-military lives. We draw from trauma and memory studies (Batley, 2007; Hunt, 2010) to show how affects are entwined in past memories to explore the multifaceted nature of their memories, and how these memories intersect with masculinity to understand how men

navigate and construct their masculinities within the context of traumatic experiences. This approach unlocks a nuanced understanding of how militarised masculinity is remembered, constructed and reinterpreted by veterans.

Memory and trauma can be closely linked to the construction of identity, shaping notions of masculinity. Van der Kolk (2014) argues that traumatic experiences can be 'stored' in the body and can impact individuals, including military personnel. In his work, Gibson (2010) addresses how memories evolve over time and that veterans may carry the memory of traumatic experiences during their service, including combat situations, violence and witnessing human rights abuses. In relation to this study, for SADF veterans, their experiences of militarised masculinity may have lasting effects on their identities and well-being. Understanding the long-term impact of these memories is crucial for grasping how militarised masculinity continues to influence their lives and perceptions of themselves.

Methods

The data in this paper forms part of a small-scale qualitative study which sought to explore the experiences of white male SADF veterans in Durban, an area located within the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province of South Africa. A total of four white male SADF veterans aged between 51 and 65 years, based in the city of Durban, were recruited. The veterans in this study reflect economic privilege and emerge from upper middle-class to middle-class contexts. While the sample is small, attempts to locate white men who were willing to share their experiences were not easy, especially in the context of post-apartheid South Africa and the antagonism against apartheid domination where the military was key in heinous crimes against black people. Finding participants who were prepared to share their experiences of the military was difficult as not all veterans when approached were comfortable in revisiting their past and thus could not be recruited. Nonetheless, we are not interested in representivity. Rather, our focus is on the contextual and peculiarities of experience through in-depth interviews with veterans as they reflect on the negotiation of masculinity. The recruitment of four participants was, in part, influenced by the availability of willing individuals who met the specific criteria for inclusion in the study, that is white male veterans who served the SADF during the apartheid era in South Africa. This unique focus limited the pool of potential participants. Given the historical context and the age of the participants, locating individuals who fitted the criteria was a challenge. Hence, participants were recruited through a combination of targeted outreach, snowball sampling and referrals from individuals who were directly involved in or had knowledge of the apartheid-era military. Secondly, the research sought to delve deeply into the experiences of the participants, aiming for a thorough exploration rather than a broad, generalised survey. We did acknowledge that exploring the experiences of those who served the SADF during apartheid is a complex and sensitive phenomenon, and that participants may have had deeply personal and sometimes traumatic experiences. Given the depth of exploration required, we believed that conducting in-depth interviews with a smaller number of participants would allow for richer, more detailed insights into their experiences. Hence, a smaller sample size of four enabled a more in-depth engagement with participants, ensuring their comfort, consent and protection throughout the research process.

The veterans in our sample are all retired military officers who each served in the SADF between 1978 and 1991 and who were assigned different duties, such as an infantry battalion soldier, kitchen worker, special services battalion soldier and a paramedic. Two of the veterans are white English speaking while the other two, each share a mixed ethnicity of both English and Afrikaner origin but align with English cultural values. Of the four veterans, one identified as gay. Ethical approval was obtained from the institution (anonymised) with the following approval number: JM 1/22. All participants were given information on the nature of study and were required to sign consent forms. An interview guide included questions focused on veterans' accounts of hegemonic masculinity through their life histories, particularly around their childhood, their time during military service and their ideas of manhood in a post-apartheid South Africa. The interviews consisted of questions such as 'What were the expectations of you as a young white male?', 'What were the expectations of you in the SADF?', 'How was masculinity constructed in the SADF?', 'How did constructions of masculinity in the SADF affect you?' and 'How did constructions of masculinity in the SADF shape your notion of manhood post-apartheid?'. The interviews were flexible, allowing for participants to share additional experiences, as well as of other soldiers they knew, and events that had taken place. These anecdotes assisted in broadening the scope of data for the study, by providing accounts of soldiers they knew that we were unable to interview.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participant and were paused during moments when participants felt tired and required a break from speaking. Efforts were made by the researcher to create a relaxed and comfortable environment for the interview and participants were not forced into speaking about an experience they did not wish to share. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. Interviews were manually transcribed verbatim by the third author. Interviews were manually transcribed verbatim by the third author and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. The analysis process commenced with the transcription of all interviews to transform spoken narratives into written text. Thereafter, the author read and re-read the transcripts for familiarisation and to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's responses. Each transcript was then coded using an inductive approach that involved the systematic identification of recurring words, phrases and patterns within the interviews, representing significant concepts, ideas or experiences expressed by the participants. The author then developed and refined the codes into broader themes which was driven by identifying patterns, commonalities and connections among the codes. This was followed by the development of themes by identifying the underlying threads that connected the categories and named in a way that accurately represents the content they capture. Each theme is clearly defined and named, and provides a detailed description of what it represents. To ensure rigour and reliability, all authors actively engaged in regular discussions and meetings throughout the analysis process to address discrepancies or differences in interpretation. Three themes emerged and focused on hegemonic masculine ideals as enforced by a militarised culture, the effects of hegemonic masculinity on veterans and the gendered attitudes of veterans in a post-apartheid era. These themes along with their illustrative quotes are discussed in the next section.

Groomed to be a soldier: enforcing an idealised militarised masculinity

In reflecting on the experiences of veterans, we draw on specific moments in their lives both prior to and during their military service that emphasised an ideal masculine identity as expected by the SADF. Drawing on their childhood memories, we demonstrate how militarised norms infiltrated the broader social context through family households and social institutions to reinforce, regulate and (re)produceideals of a militarised masculinity in preparation for their inevitable role as conscripts of the SADF. While white masculinity was considered as privileged during apartheid, a hierarchal level of whiteness was made visible amongst white men through Afrikaner conservatism that shaped constructions of masculine identity. The veterans shared accounts of how they were expected to align within the dominate prescripts of an Afrikaner identity through language, conduct and culture that created unequal relations of male power and subordination. In the excerpt below, we show how schools were actively complicit in moulding young white boys into an ideal militarised masculinity:

> *Winston*: You know when you're at school they have a thing called cadets [military-like training programme]. I don't know if anyone has talked to you about that, but from an early age, I thinkstandard 8[grade 10] or standard 7[grade 9], which is three years before you finish school, every Friday once a month you have to dress in a brown uniform and stand on the sports field and, as a guy, learn to march, you can also learn to shoot. It was sort of the preparation of people at the school level to get to easily … more easilyinducted into the military, right, to the SADF.

> *Stanley*: If you were sloppy, they would whip you. I remember one incident with um … he was actually below the principal, the sub-principal or whatever they call it … assistant principal. He was on the field one day and he had a long cane and he whipped me across the back of the leg. It was from, I think it was from standard 8, we must have been 14.

As Symons (2020) notes, military values and etiquette were essential to young boys' experiences of schooling and were incorporated into the school curricula and facilitated by school personnel through the cadet programmes. Cadet programmes at school were key to the inculcation and development of militarised qualities, through affective economies in the form of decorum, body posture and behaviour that were integral in the construction of a militarised masculine identity as envisioned by the SADF. Cadet programmes prioritised practical training amongst boys in the form of shooting, saluting, the use of radios and intelligence training (Conway, 2004; Symons, 2020). These skills were militaristic requirements and schools established a highly disciplined environment that mirrored the SADF. Winston's reference to 'brown uniform', 'march' and 'shoot' is illustrative of the affective economies that serve as resources and the performance required in grooming young white boys towards a hegemonic masculine ideal.

The regulation of a militarised masculinity within school spaces not only reinforced the need to maintain white supremacy and an apartheid regime but also proliferated the idea of an idealised hegemonic masculine status as associated with military qualities and that any one deviating from the norm would be considered as less of a man. Those who displayed resistance or strayed from the rules of cadet programmes were reprimanded. Stanley recalls a moment when his undesired behaviour resulted in

unpleasant consequences. For Stanley, corporal punishment was administered by the assistant principal. Our findings resonate with earlier research that highlights how non-compliance in military tasks threatened the very basis of gender militarised authoritarian norms (Conway, 2008, 2012). In former white schools, corporal punishment was administered in line with the goal of militarisation, where toughness and strength to endure pain and punishment were key to military masculinity. The formation of cadet programmes was aligned to the development of tough masculinity and those who showed resistance to cadet activities were seen as disloyal to the goal of white supremacy and were punished accordingly (Hunter & Morrell, 2021). In Stanley's case, the use of the cane as punishment until perfection in training was achieved is indicative of the unequal power relations between the adult and child, with the assistant principal as a figure of authority and control attempting to maintain the ideals and social norms of an ideal masculinity, in keeping with the social order. The enforcement of such practices during the cadet programme was necessary in ensuring young white boys entered the military with an understanding of what discipline entailed and a zero tolerance for mediocrity. The enforcement of a hegemonic masculine ideal in young white boys was accentuated further during military conscription where an Afrikaner conservatism dominated the SADF:

> *Winston*: The language would often be in Afrikaans … a lot of anti-sentiment against British people. If you couldn't speak Afrikaans, it would be very difficult. So, if you're English you get um … you get kind of ostracised, cause you're like a, a beach bum, and you've got longish hair, and you got probably baggies on or a lax t-shirt, and you stick out. And so then, the language would often be in Afrikaans, and it would be a lot of empty sentiment against English people. And they would use a lot of terminology like 'Jou Engels Man'[you Englishman] … If you couldn't speak Afrikaans, it was very difficult, and some people couldn't.
>
> *Stanley:* Immediately all the English boys and the Afrikaans boys were separated … and they very quickly saw who they thought were effeminate and who were not. SADF was a very bad place … you weren't allowed to speak English. The first three days they starved us … you've got to remember that time 78-79[1978–1979] was like the country was coming apart. It was probably the worst time.

For conscripts who joined the SADF, an idealised white militarised masculinity was largely underpinned by Afrikaner logic that involved the use of the Afrikaans language which favoured Afrikaner men. Those who did not speak Afrikaans and were not quick to adapt to the language were subjected to ridicule and unequal treatment. Apart from the language, cultural differences through physical appearances were prominent in identifying the English from Afrikaner men. Winston's references to 'beach bum', 'longish hair', 'baggies' and 'lax t-shirt', echoed by Afrikaner officers, point to discourses of class and culture in which English men were ostracised, for these positioned them as inferior. An Afrikaner cultural hegemony prioritised a rigid decorum, formal conduct, physical fitness and self-discipline that aligned within hegemonic masculine ideals. For the SADF, practising robust military masculinity elevated white men's sense of power. English conscripts who displayed casual dressing and unruly hair contrasted with the ideal and hence were perceived as incapable of conforming to a militarised masculine status which elevated power for Afrikaner men. Afrikaner officers believed English men to be lazy and as a result sought to 'work' English men in ways that dispelled this assumed stereotype. The dislike for English men was made

blatantly visible upon entry into military conscription through group categorisation as indicated by Stanley. Another criterion of the SADF was a zero tolerance for effeminacy. From the conduct of men, Afrikaner military officers were quick to assess those who were effeminate or not and those who were required more work in adhering to the prescribed masculine ideal. An idealised hegemonic militarised masculinity functioned within a highly patriarchal structure that denounced the feminine or any of its associated qualities (Conway, 2012). Winston's statement brings attention to the heterosexual compulsion within the SADF. Whilst the apartheid regime regulated race and sexual identity through oppressive laws and a Christian national ethos, heterosexuality was not exclusive to the Afrikaner state. Heterosexuality was entangled with colonial logics, whiteness and privilege where non-gender conforming men and black men were positioned as subordinate. Winston's statement is thus reflective of the complex link between apartheid and broader colonial values. Whilst appearing distinct, they converged through disgrace and sexual hierarchies in which the othering of race, female subordination and non-normative sexualities was produced. It was difficult for both Afrikaner and English men to speak out in such a context of authoritarianism and conservatism. In this context, Winston's statement reflects the broader colonial effects which complexly entwined with and enforced within Afrikaner cultural values, with each having its specific yet analogous ethos opposing homosexuality and marginalising 'others'. The persistent adherence to heterosexuality across linguistic and cultural groups underscores the complexities of militarised masculinity during the apartheid era. Men from Durban were especially targeted as Wayne shares below:

> *Wayne*: There was an aggression … underlying aggression towards anything really that you could put a label on. So, you know Durbanites [an inhabitant of Durban], they were a this or a that …
>
> *Interviewer*: Why Durbanites?
>
> *Wayne:* Because you smoke marijuana … and hang out with black people.

The term 'Durbanites' refers to those who reside in Durban, and within militarised settings is reflective of the ethnic and cultural connotations attached to the area. Historically, Durban was viewed as the 'last outpost' in what was referred to as the Colony of Natal in 1843 after British annexure. While Durban is located in what is now called KwaZulu-Natal, this area was historically rooted in English and Afrikaner struggles and conflict for land and power and shaped how Durban was conceived of in relation to white English domination. The contempt expressed above for white Durbanites was historically situated and emphasises the struggles between white English and Afrikaners. Reference is also made above to the use of marijuana and association with black people as a means to harass and intimidate white English conscripts. Noting that marijuana was prohibited in South Africa at the time and in the SADF, which imposed strict moral conduct, accusations of marijuana use were an important means to diminish the status of Durbanite conscripts. The socialisation of liberal English white men with black people during the apartheid period was seen as betrayal to the apartheid regime. Wayne's recollection of the 'Durbanites' stereotype by Afrikaner officials highlights the underlying tensions within white English liberalism. For example, even though some white English men may not have actively supported

or embraced Afrikaner cultural values, and were targeted by the Afrikaner state for their alignment with and pursuit of non-racial democracy, the power accrued to whiteness, has a historical basis. Colonialism, its rooting in heteronormativity and male power, was inadvertently reinforced through the apartheid system. In fact, affective economics in the form of apartheid geographies, language and the ways which spaces were allocated to whites only continued to reinforce race and gender inequalities while upholding heterosexuality. Visible is the role of emotions and affective economies in shaping individual and collective experiences, particularly within the context of SADF veterans and their experiences of masculinity. In many ways, Wayne's recollection destabilises a simple binary between white Afrikaner and English masculinity while illustrating the apparatus through which power and privilege manifested around whiteness.

'You're being a moffie': subordinated masculinity and religious conservatism

As elaborated in the previous section, an Afrikaner militarised masculinity revolved around a highly autocratic and disciplined system. Ideal manhood was constituted of physical strength, being athletically able, having the ability to inflict violence, being devoid of emotional attachment and having command of the Afrikaans language. At the same time, this process of masculinity making also involved respect for authority and elders and senior officers. In this section, we demonstrate the experiences of SADF veterans during their time in the military as they discussed the pressures in which they encountered in conforming to Afrikaner ideals of manhood. Apart from their own experiences, the veterans also shared incidents of other soldiers who did not conform:

> *Winston:* If you weren't a, if you weren't a person who was, like, maybe outwardly strong, they would just, you know, it was a slander term, like hey, 'you're being a moffie [gay] now'. 'Why are you crying about that?' 'Are you gay?' or if you've got a problem, you know, as opposed to not exhibit, as opposed to somebody who might exhibit those things or, you know, was just naturally physically or maybe more effeminate or spoke that way. That would probably be definitely those people who would get that, that sort of slander.

Winston's statement draws on the heterosexual imperative that functioned within the SADF during the apartheid regime, where heterosexuality was deeply embedded within an Afrikaner ethos that denounces homosexuality. The affective economy in this context involves the pressure to conform to a particular image of strength and the emotional toll of failing to do so. An Afrikaner conservatism revolved around Christian principles which operated within heterosexual ideals. Alternate patterns of sexuality were viewed disparagingly (Conway, 2008). From Winston's statement, men who were not physically strong and displayed emotional intensities were considered effeminate. Hence such men were therefore labelled as 'moffie'. In South Africa, the term 'moffie' refers to men who display female qualities and are viewed as effeminate (van Der Wal, 2019). This labelling is an affective response to non-conformity, reflecting society's tendency to categorise and stigmatise those who do not fit established norms. In keeping with a stringent Afrikaner regime that valorised toughness, 'crying' was not aligned with the militarised ideal. Men who did not conform to the heterosexual ideal

were perceived to fail the political goals of the country. In van Der Wal's (2019) textual representation of gender and sexuality, effeminate men who were referred to as 'moffie' were presented as 'menacing, treacherous and disgraceful' (p. 1). This highlights the affective economy of judgment based on appearances and behaviour, where individuals are judged and labelled based on stereotypes. However, the effects of subordination were greater for gay men who declared their sexuality as Winston elaborates:

> *Winston:* So those guys [gays] got like worked harder. They got laughed at, they were the butt of a joke, when a joke could be made. Like, 'check him, he's running so slow'. We expect, you know, he is a gay boy, or you know they'll be, they'd be that because the psychology I think of these non-commissioned officers particularly was also about building rapport with those that were of the stronger more masculine side, like the military does. So, they would use that, I would think, to also rally their bond between those guys who were strong and hard and prepared to do it, against others, and check it in, 'come on John', or whatever his name was, it would be his surname. They would never use his first name. 'Get your legs up, otherwise, your boyfriend is going to beat you with a bag or something' and all the guys would laugh, you know. Not everyone was laughing because it was funny, but some of them would laugh because it was something to laugh at or others would, you know. But it was largely derogatory.

Winston's account illustrates the affective experiences of discrimination, bullying and social dynamics within the military, particularly for gay individuals. The affective economies at play encompass emotional harm, isolation and the complex interplay of power dynamics and social conformity. For gay men, serving the military meant disguising their sexuality in the presence of a hardened militarised force. As is evident from Winston's statement, being gay or perceived as such created uneasiness and discomfort within the military culture, for the conscripts as well as for the permanent force. The above data draw attention to the use of hypermasculine behaviour by commissioned officers to assert dominance and control over other men who were seen as effeminate in order to regulate and sustain masculine ideals (Hinojosa, 2010). The operation of power dynamics is visible between the non-commissioned officers and men who were perceived as effeminate, as Winston recalls how some men (non-commissioned officers) united with stronger groups to ridicule and humiliate a minority of gay men who failed to ascribe to hegemonic masculine ideals. The failure to conform to hegemonic standards positioned gay men as increasingly vulnerable to victimisation. In perpetuating hostility towards gay men, these officers strived to elevate their masculine status and fit in with the wider majority, while degrading the former. Stanley, who is gay, described his experience as a teenage boy against an idealised hegemonic masculinity during his forced conscription in 1978:

> *Stanley*: Yeah, we were worse off because we were gay. And you're not going to believe what I tell you about how that turned out. I mean, in the first two, three weeks, my brother Bryan was very badly beaten up and he ended up with internal bleeding. By the fourth or fifth week, I was in hospital too, I had tried to take a whole lot of poisons and I ended up in a serious condition and this in Bloemfontein. It was military hospital … I can still smell that hospital and I can still see the blood on the floor because they would never clean it. And then I met Bruce. In the bed next to Bruce, was another young guy who I knew was homosexual … and we didn't know the word gay yet. And I went to talk to him, he looked so ill this boy. He tried to take his life as well. I don't

> remember his name, I think it was Brendan. Anyway, I went to him and I said to him, you know, 'why did you do that?' And he said, 'it's because I'm gay.' So, I said to him that's nice. I didn't know what the hell that meant.

The affective economies at play encompass pain, isolation, trauma and a search for a sense of identity and belonging in the face of adversity. Stanley and his twin brother, Bryan, who are gay were not exempt from the toxic effects of the SADF's militarised culture. A gay status meant that there was an ever-present risk of humiliation and abuse, as we see in the case of Bryan. For Bryan, being gay subjected him to an assault which endangered his life. In Stanley's case, the toxic military environment became prevalent as he attempted suicide to escape the harsh reality which he had been exposed to. Our findings resonate with earlier research where the pressure to conform to masculine ideals for gay men in militarised settings resulted in traumatic consequences (Belkin & Canaday, 2010). Stanley's recollection of the military hospital in Bloemfontein, including the smell and the uncleanliness, reflects the affective residue of a traumatic memory. This memory is laden with negative emotions and sensory experiences, contributing to the affective economy of trauma associated with the hospital. Notwithstanding hospitals as presumed places for treatment and well-being, this was not the case for gay men as Stanley reveals:

> *Stanley:* When I was 17 years old, Bruce and I knew we were gay, we told them we were homosexual, we told them at 17.
>
> *Interviewer*: You told the psychiatrist?
>
> *Stanley*: We told them straight.
>
> *Interviewer*: And how did he react?
>
> *Stanley:* Well, they were horrible. You know what the hell is wrong with you? Language you can't even mention.

The excerpts demonstrate the affective experiences and affective economy related to the disclosure of one's sexual orientation, particularly in the face of negative reactions and stigmatisation. Stanley's account highlights the emotional impact of discrimination and the resilience of individuals who assert their identities in the face of adversity. Military hospitals were complicit in the regulation of a conservative apartheid culture and its ideologies, the main aim being to enforce a hegemonic masculine conduct that was desired to serve the state. This is evident from health care workers such as the hospital psychiatrist who attended to both Stanley and Bruce, who clearly prioritised military ideals above all medical responsibility. Upon disclosure of their sexuality to the psychiatrist, both Stanley and Bruce were subjected to resentment. Contrary to treating them with care, the psychiatrist inflicted shame and verbal abuse towards these men. The psychiatrists' negative response has a profound emotional impact on Stanley and Bruce. It shapes their affective experiences, leading to feelings of alienation and being stigmatised due to their sexual orientation. The affective economy, in this case, is heavily influenced by societal norms, prejudices and stereotypes surrounding homosexuality. This not only humiliated them and contributed to their vulnerability as gay men but reinforced an idealised hegemonic masculinity. Hospitals too were considered as agents of militarisation and men who were able to display a convincing masculine conduct had an increased chance of survival. In

contrast to militarised hegemonic masculine qualities such as self-control and being mentally disciplined, the embodiment of effeminacy was a signifier of weakness (Gibson, 2010).

'I was turned off by the SADF': being a man in post-apartheid South Africa

In this section, we demonstrate how veterans' military experiences have altered their perceptions of masculinity as white men in a post-apartheid South Africa. Notwithstanding the ways in which hegemonic masculinity framed SADF veterans' experiences during their childhood and time in the military, the veterans in this study share how dominant ideologies as endorsed by the SADF impacted their lives and shaped their current views on gender and masculinity in particular. While rigid views of masculinity were still embedded in some participants as they positioned themselves within broader constructs of masculinity, the majority of the veterans shared nuanced views on gender and sexuality that countered hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. For some, despite being outside the limits of a strict hegemonic masculinity, being in the SADF resulted in trauma in their lives outside the military in the form of an identity conflict. For other veterans like Stanley, the anger, anguish and toughness experienced during his time in the military altered the way he perceived others that reflected a shift in masculinity after returning home from the SADF. Stanley recalls an incident when his father's store was being robbed where he struggled to negotiate his masculine identity upon re-entry into civilian life:

> *Stanley*: I looked over the fence and my dad had gone down to confront him and he was attacking my dad … I went down there, and like that day in the car with that corporal except this day my physical reaction unleashed, I beat the shit out of him. Me, a very meek and mild-mannered guy, you know?
>
> *Interviewer*: What triggered that?
>
> *Stanley*: I don't know. Just because he was attacking my dad, I kind of just. I just exploded. Yeah. And it was so bad. I was in such a bad psychological condition. They didn't ask me to come to court. He was charged. He only got a very light sentence. I mean, I felt so terrible. And I realised that was when I was 19, when I realised, I've got to be careful of this. This thing that they put into me. This anger and this fear, which is almost this creature, this reaction in me, I've got to be careful of that … you went in boys, and you came out broken.

The incident described by Stanley points to the deep internalisation of hegemonic masculine behaviour as endorsed by the SADF outside a non-military environment and how powerful emotional reactions and their physical manifestations can shape one's affective economy. For Stanley, the infliction of physical violence, display of anger and aggressive behaviour over his father's attacker immediately positioned him within the dominant ideals of a militarised hegemonic masculinity. The dominance attained by Stanley through such actions disassociated him from the 'very meek and mild-mannered guy' he described himself to be prior to his conscription in the SADF, triggering an identity crisis. Stanley's example is illustrative of the masculine military ideologies that continued to define his position in society. Stanley's reaction to the attacker invoked familiar version of masculinity and the use of violence. Stanley's reference to 'you went in boys, and you came out broken' is indicative of the prolonged

trauma encountered in the SADF that continued to impact his behaviour negatively. Our findings resonate with other research where an adherence to masculine norms during military service impacted the experiences and mental health of veterans outside non-military environments where a challenge in defining one's true identity resulted in identity conflict, anxiety and depression amongst veterans (Gibson, 2010; Ramon, Guthrie, & Rochester, 2020; Smith & True, 2014). Stanley's narrative provides evidence of the complexity in relation to language, culture, memory, and masculinity in South Africa. Stanley reflects on an emotionally charged moment, associated with an unexpected outburst of violence that leads to a profound revelation. This emotional eruption vividly illustrates how intense feelings can remain latent within an individual until a triggering event brings them to the surface. This form of masculinity, characterised by toughness and aggression, becomes 'sticky' and persists within him even after he leaves the military. The violent outburst serves as evidence that this militarised masculinity is not easily shed. The act of violence serves as a tangible manifestation of the intense emotions Stanley experienced, underscoring the role of memory in shaping contemporary masculinity. Stanley's struggle to pinpoint the catalyst behind his violent reaction and his subsequent contemplation of 'this thing that they put into me' highlight the interplay of cultural, linguistic and societal factors that shape individual and collective memories. The use of the term 'this thing' suggests an elusive quality to the impact of his military experiences, revealing the profound psychological trauma he endured. Stanley reflects on how he realised the presence of anger and fear as almost like a 'creature' within him. This insight points to the affective economy of self-awareness and self-examination. He recognises the emotional conditioning that he underwent, possibly during his military service and acknowledges the need to be cautious and vigilant about these emotions. The concept of 'coming out broken' conveys the enduring effects of military service on the construction of masculinity. The affective economy here encompasses the loss of innocence, the emotional toll of military service and the reshaping of his identity due to the experiences he endured. Discussing these memories is further complicated by the profound shifts in masculinity brought about by military service and the cultural and linguistic divisions prevalent in the country. Apart from the mental anguish and trauma experienced by veterans that defined their perceptions of masculinity, Derrick shared a more nuanced version of masculinity:

> *Derrick*: Oh. Um. You know, there's this whole notion of what is a man. You know. And … yeah, you've got to stand up. Be responsible. You've got to make sure things happen. Be caring, loving, and go on to have a partner or family if you have family … but it's, you know, in our societies, you know, men are the breadwinners and protectors of the family or the home. And that, part of what you do and who you are.

The notion of manhood for Derrick reflects the affective economy of traditional masculinity, which involves a complex interplay of emotions, expectations and roles such as men as financial providers, protectors and initiators of change. It highlights how the affective economy is shaped by these emotions and attachments, influencing how individuals perceive their place in society. Simultaneously Derrick's ideas of manhood are in stark contrast with aggressiveness as propagated by the SADF. For Derrick, being a man also constitutes being loving and caring, qualities that challenge hegemonic masculinity. While Derrick's perception of masculinity in a post-apartheid

society is reflective of both rigid and alternate masculinity, other veterans in the study shared more progressive views of masculinity:

> *Wayne*: I was very turned off by what they [SADF] tried to present, as you know, what is manly, that is. Yeah. It was not at all disguised. I think to become a good person is something that is earned. But no, I don't think that you necessarily become a man or a woman.
>
> *Winston*: If it has to be earned, that means somebody is judging it, right. I don't really believe so, but believe that if you're respectful, if you have a healthy and balanced aspect to your character that could be defined as manhood … you know, kindness and compassion.

For Wayne, it becomes evident that his perception of manhood goes beyond gender categorisation. For Wayne, the importance of being a good human being surpassed gendered prescripts, as documented in other research (Spector-Mersel & Gilbar, 2021). Wayne's belief that becoming a good person is something that must be earned disrupts the affective economy related to the moral and ethical aspects of identity. It introduces the affect of worthiness, implying that individuals must actively work to achieve goodness. Winston questions the notion of judgment, introducing an affective perspective that suggests that someone else must evaluate and judge one's worthiness. From Wayne's example it becomes evident that not all white male SADF veterans held onto the Afrikaner ideologies of masculinity. Evident here is Wayne's ability to adopt a progressive view of gender despite being exposed to a hegemonic masculine environment. Winston offers an alternative perspective on defining manhood, emphasising qualities like respect, balance, kindness and compassion. This represents an affective shift away from traditional, rigid definitions of masculinity. The affective economy here includes notions of empathy and emotional intelligence, challenging the normative expectations of what it means to be a man. Both Wayne and Winston renegotiated the meaning of hegemonic masculinity by resisting a hegemonic ideal (Stough-Hunter & Hart, 2015). For Stanley, a change from aggressive conduct as a military conscript in the SADF to a different way of being is evident below:

> *Stanley*: You know, this just doesn't make sense to me. Because [in] my understanding of the human race, manhood is such a tiny part of it. I see the world. It's a sliding scale, of completely gay, to completely straight … manhood to me has always been kind of a fake word. It's kind of a very tiny spectrum of humanity. Yeah, I think there's so much more to us. I mean, today, I've come full circle. You're meeting the best part of me. I've become more in touch with my feminine side. I've reclaimed Stanley.

Stanley's perception of masculinity presents a clear shift from the one promoted by the SADF as he reconceptualises manhood upon re-entry into civilian life. Stanley no longer allows masculine military ideals to define his position in the gendered social order and displays a nuanced notion of masculinity by emphasising that men can no longer be defined by a set of principles. Not only has Stanley disassociated himself from the indoctrination of a hegemonic masculine identity as sanctioned by the SADF, but through developing his own views of masculinity, he has also reclaimed and embraced his sexual identity as a gay man. Over the years, Stanley has processed the trauma he had undergone in his earlier life and has embraced the feminine side of him that he once kept discrete in the SADF. While serving in the SADF, Stanley was

forced to abide within an idealised hegemonic masculinity, by conforming to the notion of a military man while supressing his sexuality. Stanley's statement, 'today, I've come full circle', suggests an affective transformation demonstrating a significant change in his understanding of himself and the world around him. The affective economy in this case includes the relief of self-discovery and the empowerment of living authentically, highlighting the dynamic nature of affect and how it influences one's understanding of themselves and their place in society.

Conclusion

In this paper, we sought to explore white male SADF veterans' experiences of masculinity. Using 'hegemonic masculinity' as a theoretical backdrop, this paper presented veterans' experience of masculinity as white 'English' speaking South African men who lacked political power but accrued benefits in relation to whiteness and the history of colonialism. By attending to the veterans' life experiences and their time in the SADF, this paper demonstrated the various ways in which hegemonic masculinity infiltrated their everyday lives, as well as social institutions in shaping the desired militarised masculine ideal.

Notwithstanding veterans' exposure to aggression and violence, the veterans in this study shared more progressive views of masculinity that were counter-hegemonic. While some veterans experienced trauma upon re-entry into civilian life through emulating hegemonic masculine behaviour, this was momentary as they later showed resistance to such ideals by developing alternate perceptions of masculinity which were in stark contrast to their time experienced as conscripts under apartheid. In the case of Stanley, this involved reclaiming his sexual identity as a proud gay man. Despite white SADF men not being primary victims of apartheid, the experiences of white male SADF veterans are useful in demonstrating how power dynamics infiltrated an already privileged white masculinity, creating unequal power relations and showing the fluidity of whiteness and the masculinity. The findings provide useful insights in illuminating how white men were able to readjust their perceptions of masculinity through embracing alternate conceptions of masculinity. These insights remain valuable in illustrating masculinity as being in flux. Following Myrttinen et al. (2017), the findings in this study offer are-thinking of hegemonic masculinity in militarised settings, towards a more progressive perception of masculinity that includes ethical masculinities that are not centred on the use of violence.

Note on the use of British and English

The British in South Africa especially in the context of the 1820 arrival of British settlers were broadly defined as white English-speaking people in opposition to the 1652 Dutch settlers who spoke Afrikaans and were categorised as Afrikaners. In South Africa white South Africans who speak English are commonly known as the English even though the settlers emerged from different parts of Britain. In this paper, we use English to denote this localised understanding of white English-speaking South Africans.

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