

**You are playing with your life  
everyday: Military men's likelihood  
for violence perpetration &  
victimisation?**

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# Introduction

- Guns are reported to be a key feature of hegemonic masculinity which is pervasive not just in movies and video games but also in the military culture, such that men have become desensitized to them, supporting a violent culture identifying with militarised men
- It is mostly men who are in front of and behind the trigger

# Aim of the paper

- It is framed in the context of the challenge of homicide in South Africa and questioning whether the military men are particularly vulnerable to it.
- This is questioned on the basis of their specific military training and weapons used in this organisation.
- It looks at ways soldiers talk about invulnerability, fearlessness, danger, violence within a possession of a gun, intelligence and the physical fitness.
- It explores soldiers' likelihood for violence perpetration and victimization.

# Method

- 14 male soldiers between the ages of 24-33 years.
- Junior officers enrolled in a tertiary institution pursuing a career in the military.
- > four years in the military
- 2hr in-depth individual interviews transcribed verbatim
- The paper is underpinned by social constructionist and critical men's studies approach to masculinities
- interpretative discourse analysis.
- Pseudonyms are used

# Power in the military

- Struggle for power is a central issue for many military men.
- The struggle revolves around real and perceived economic power, physical strength, life threatening work and risky sexual practices.
- This has possible implications for violent conflict, not only with other men but also with women. Sexuality is also central to this conflict.

# Masculinity and bodies

- *John: You know because I've been characterised as a ... they used to call me a teddy bear that was when there was nothing (pointing to the beard) at that stage, that was when I joined the army. And I never felt like threatened.*
- *Identity military man serves to undermine the social construction of him as 'not man enough' with respect to his body*
- *Simon: I am full of injuries. I have been doing it rough now for 14 years. My ankles were broken, this ankle had operations, this one was shot, my wrists are sore, all my fingers have been broken, my knees are going, neck is going to break or busy cracking. ¶ So because of work my body is old. I feel I'm 60 years old but that does not stop me from challenging myself even sexually*

# Masculinity and bodies Cont.

- Bodies refers not only to physical strength but to intelligence as well
- The more risky or challenging the job, the more masculine participants felt and this is represented at both bodily and intellectual levels
- *Gerhard: I am one of the big, the big guys that will say listen here, intelligence, we are the jackals we know everything.*
- *Thando: You are playing with your life everyday*

# Masculinity and guns

- *John: At first, when we started with our training, it felt good, okay. Yoh! I used to go home after my first weapons training and so, and I used to brag with this weapon, so yes, to a certain degree it make you feel better or special then you see [] It definitely give a boost to manhood.*
- *Tshepo: You just want to drill, drill, you feel like ja (yes) ja (yes) I am in the army. [] You think that this thing is gonna explode [] On the other hand there is that excitement.*
- *Gerhard: The first time you do it, you feel like yoh! This is the big world. Once again every now and then when you handle a weapon again after a long time, once again you get that shaky feeling. You get that adrenalin rush.*



# Masculinity and guns cont.

- The weapons used in the military for some participants represent both a real and symbolic idolisation of aggression and as such function as an extension of the body
- *Gerhard: It's just like in a relationship also, at first, everything is new to you, you can't wait just to hold the girl's hand and to kiss her at night and whatever, but then after a while you get use to it and then it's not funny anymore, and ag wat. It's just another thing, there's nothing special.*
- Carrying a rifle and sexual intimacy are for G. clearly related and are associated with pleasure and power.

# Masculinity, sex & economic power

- *Simon: ... Men, shit. The Rwandans sent [most] whores to the hotels. There was a hotel just across [from] the base and the sluts will be there. And God, I wanted to take my troops, I wanted to murder them because they lined up ... 10 guys and 10 guys will do this girl in one of the room*
- *Food parcels/money in exchange for sex*
- *Sam: We pop out say hundred bucks we go to the bar we say so we sitting over there, here's the money for the night, you just supply us. [] Now, the ladies in the vicinity, usually likes the way we as soldiers are. Because in the discos we like to er make jokes. Just releasing the military. Then there usually becomes quarrelling because now the civilian guys we break their hearts.*

# Conclusion

- *Thulani: A soldier is actually trained not to fear, I'm ... I may say now some of the soldiers they fear nothing ... It is actually their motto that ... they are actually different*
- Guns serve as evidence of being hypermasculine (therefore hypersexual).
- Military scars in/on the body further are representation of successful masculinity and superiority to other men at physical (therefore sexual) level.

# Conclusion cont.

- The soldiers' direct involvement with security issues makes them feel more masculine. Their privilege to access directly modes of male power (for example war, peacekeeping) make soldiers feel special.
- Soldiers as people are exposed to life threatening situations due to the nature of their job.
- The military conditions exaggerate hegemonic masculinities and silence dissenting masculinities.
- Tackling homicide in South Africa requires rigorous examination of constructions of masculinities and how they play themselves out.

# Questions

- What are the implications of these masculine construction on homicide?
- Are soldiers' likely to be perpetrators and victims of homicide?
- If yes then what?

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