



Men, Masculinity and Violence: A critical engagement of Pentecostal Men's Conference promotional material

Homens, Masculinidade e Violência:
Um engajamento crítico do material promocional da Conferência de Homens
Pentecostais

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Abstract: The promotional media material for men's conferences and the crisis of Gender Based Violence in South Africa formed the basis of this study exploring the production of masculinity in Pentecostal men's conference promotional material at the backdrop of Gender Based Violence (GBV). Within research in general but specifically when it comes to theological or religious reflection, the way in which masculinity construction and production has been understood in relation to GBV has been underrepresented. Research has shown that heteropatriarchal ideologies of masculinity perpetuate hegemonic masculinity, contributing to the high rate of gendered pandemics in Africa. Using digital methodology, a study was conceptualised to explore masculinity production in men's conference promotional media material and the effect it has in mitigating the scourge of GBV in the South African context. The media material was analysed using critical visual analysis and framed under feminist and mediatization frameworks. This contribution offers a critical engagement of Pentecostal men's conference promotional material arguing that the production and representation of masculinity is problematic. It argues that discourses of power and dominance that are prevalent in the promotional material puts women and other men in a vulnerable position of experiencing violence. It further contends that masculinity production

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promoted in the promotional material sustains violence and reinforces hegemonic norms of masculinity within the Christian faith landscape.

Keyword: Masculinity. Power. Dominance. Promotional. Pentecostalism.

Resumo: O material promocional divulgado na mídia para conferências de homens e a crise da violência de gênero na África do Sul foram usados como base deste estudo, que explora a produção da masculinidade nesses materiais, sobretudo em meios pentecostais e tendo como pano de fundo do método investigação em Gender Based Violence (VBG). Nas pesquisas em geral, mas especificamente quando se trata de reflexão teológica ou religiosa, a forma como a construção e a produção da masculinidade têm sido compreendidas em relação à VBG tem sido sub-representada. Pesquisas demonstraram que as ideologias heteropatriarcais de masculinidade perpetuam a masculinidade hegemônica, contribuindo para o alto índice de pandemias de gênero na África. Usando metodologia digital, foi concebido um estudo para explorar a produção de masculinidade no material de mídia promocional de conferências masculinas e o efeito que isso tem na mitigação do flagelo da violência de gênero no contexto sul-africano. O material de mídia foi analisado por meio de análise visual crítica e enquadrado em estruturas feministas e de midiaticização. Essa contribuição oferece um engajamento crítico do material promocional da conferência de homens pentecostais, argumentando que a produção e a representação da masculinidade são problemáticas. Argumenta-se que os discursos de poder e dominação que prevalecem no material promocional e colocam tanto as mulheres quanto outros homens em uma posição vulnerável e suscetível a sofrer violência. Além disso, afirma que a produção de masculinidade promovida no material promocional sustenta a violência e reforça as normas hegemônicas de masculinidade no cenário da fé cristã.

Palavras-chave: Masculinidade. Poder. Dominância. Promocional. Pentecostalismo.

Introduction

Hegemonic masculinity has been argued to perpetuate toxic masculinities and is at the centre of the prevalence of gendered pandemics such as HIV and AIDS and Gender Based Violence (GBV) (Chitando, 2012). According to the South African Demographic and Health report,³ a quarter of women in South Africa has experienced violence and sexual violence at the hands of their partners. South Africa in the last three to five years has seen a high visibility and awareness of GBV and this is due to a number of incidents of GBV that have been reported in the media. Gender-Based

³ South Africa demographic and Health Survey [Online]. Available at: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR337/FR337.pdf#page389>. (Accessed 14 October 2022)



Violence is defined as violence against women that results in or likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or deprivation of liberty (Oladepo & Arulogun, 2011).

Violence against women is a persistent social problem in our society that is both rooted in patriarchal and cultural ideologies of what it means to be men and women. Though there are prevention programs aimed at mitigating factors of GBV, research shows that it is still persistent (Jewkes, Rachel & Morrell, 2018). This social crisis led us to think about the production of masculinity in men's conference promotional material within Pentecostal faith traditions and how this production in religious/theological space may perpetuate violence against women.⁴ Pentecostal men's conferences are conceptualized to be a space or platform in which men are encouraged to be men and how they should be men within the Pentecostal faith traditions. Conceptualized innocently with the aim of empowering men, these conferences can be dangerous in a context plagued with gendered pandemics. The study explored how masculinity in Pentecostal men's conference promotional media is produced, constructed and reconstructed in light of the scourge of GBV within the South African context. In analysing this promotional material using critical visual analysis, it found two dominant discourses, power and dominance. This contribution argues that the production and representation of masculinity in promotional material (images one and two) is problematic because it actively promotes male power which puts women and other men in vulnerable position to experience violence. It contends that masculinity production promoted in the promotional material sustains violence and reinforces hegemonic norms of masculinity within the Christian faith landscape.

⁴ The research project that forms the basis for the argument developed in this contribution served as the Masters thesis in Gender and Religion completed by Siwakhile Ngcobo in 2020 entitled: *Powerful, Penetrator, Provider: A Religio-Cultural analysis of Masculinity Production in Men's Conference Promotional Media in the South African Pentecostal Context*.

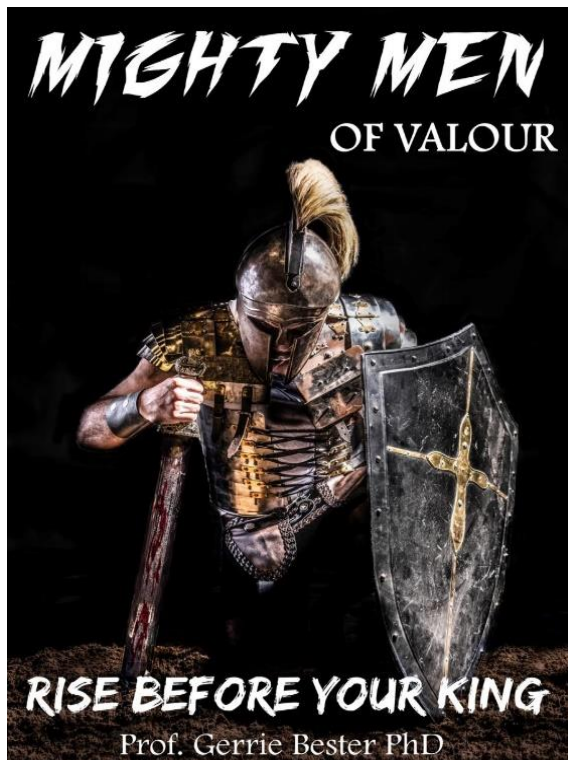


Image One: Might Men of Valour



Image two. Restoring The Man.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The above promotional posters⁵⁶ were selected for the study using digital methods which allowed to enter into the visual culture as an interdisciplinary field to studying artefacts and their perceptual expressions of beliefs (Tsuria, Aya Yadlin-Segal, Vitullo, & Campbell, 2017, p.73-97). This visual culture is made up of images produced by religious groups to promote their cause and events (Hand, 2017, p. 217-231). Image

⁵ <http://www.roaringtruthministries.co.za/index.php/mighty-men-of-valor>. The Roaring Thruth Ministries is a ministry located in Bloemfontein and founded by Prof Gerrie Bester, it is an evangelical church that is predominantly attracting Afrikaner community. The church has two sites in which it operates, Bethlehem and Cape Town. The church annually hosts a mighty man of valor conference in both cities.

⁶[https://www.facebook.com/grcmain/photos/pcb.2766840536703909/2766839913370638/?__cf_t__\[0\]=AZVAeTdkeppgZ5TyZ3AK3CKJOi1lxsEccFEu5yS2A1yIP01WXBtcd8fp5iR8rByKs mmRTq3IK4kL1jJtA0SAUvz3MyTnBM_FSAkE7PME21txbGTuT3jJrblmT1pM1ulF8Hftz6tC oCGRFUNtj4OeTvBhThy_KRKROXCE9qgc6wInQ&__tn__=*bH-R](https://www.facebook.com/grcmain/photos/pcb.2766840536703909/2766839913370638/?__cf_t__[0]=AZVAeTdkeppgZ5TyZ3AK3CKJOi1lxsEccFEu5yS2A1yIP01WXBtcd8fp5iR8rByKs mmRTq3IK4kL1jJtA0SAUvz3MyTnBM_FSAkE7PME21txbGTuT3jJrblmT1pM1ulF8Hftz6tC oCGRFUNtj4OeTvBhThy_KRKROXCE9qgc6wInQ&__tn__=*bH-R)

<https://mytft.co.za>.

Global Reconciliation Church is based in Bloemfontein, Manguang. Founded by Apostle Rammile, it seeks to reconcile individuals, cities and nations back to God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



one presents a man in a battlefield, presumably white based on the colour of his hands. The objects in this image are a shield and sword, these are essential when going into war. It follows then that men are called to rise before the king, armed and ready for battle not only for their families but also their faith. The highlighting and use of bold letter for “*MIGHTY MEN*” is suggestive that men are mighty, powerful and they demand attention. Men from a young age are socialized to be strong, powerful, fearless, aggressive and dominant in their embodiment and performance of masculinity (Ratele, Shefer, Strelbel & Fouten, 2010, p. 557-67). As a socially constructed gender identity, masculinity is characterized by strength, toughness, risk taking, non-feminine traits and dominant (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell, Dunkle & Shea, 2011).

In her theorization of gender, Connell (2002) asserts that gender is a social condition that is actively constructed by members of society. Gender through social construction becomes a social structure which defines gender identity. The social structure offers patens of fundamental differences and bodily differences between male and female bodies which are considered to be natural (Connell, 2002, p.9). According to Tolbert, the essential approach considers gender as inherent to an individual and constructs gender on the presumption of biological sex which gives existence to gender binaries. Gender binary is defined as gender concerning biological sex, limiting the acceptance of various gender expressions. The functional differences between sexes, between male and female enabled the construction of gendered identities, masculinity as a male gender identity and femininity as female gender identity (Connell, 2002; Morrel 2001). These identities are constructed through societal gender order which allocates power, possibilities, limits and obligations based on gender identity.

Gebregoergis (2016, p 91-102) assets that masculinity as gender identity is characterised by display of power, aggression and strength while femininity is oppositional to masculinity. The gender hierarchy has somewhat informed the theorization of masculinity being centred on issues of power and dominance. Sterwart (2016, p. 91-102) asserts that one of the ways in which religious construction of masculinity is reflected within a patriarchal masculine frame is how power and dominance is demonstrated through aggression in battle and bravery acts. The bravery



act in this particular poster is that of a might men of valour which has a biblical reference of Gideon in Judges 6v 12,⁷ where he is commissioned to save Israel from the Medianites. This commission positions Gideon in a position of power, Roaring Truth Ministries also position men to be powerful but what happens when this positional power is challenged or threatened?

The might men of valour embody this celebrated gendered representation of masculinity that religion and culture expect from men. To really understand male power or masculine power as displayed in image one, supported by sword which is used to penetrate, Nadar (2009, p. 551-561) asserts we need to pay attention to the ways in which power is maintained if ever we are to win the fight against GBV. She asserts that we need to pay attention to positional power and discursive power but first, we must deconstruct the patriarchal ideologies that inform masculinity construction within the religious landscape. The dominant ideologies in which masculinity is conceptualized within the religious context are that of male headship as agency, men being providers and are to display and exercise power (Van Klinken, 2011, p.104-124).

The men in the second image are all wearing suits, which symbolizes power, the dress code here becomes a symbol and embodiment of successful masculinity, again positioning them in the position of power. The changing current economic status and changing gender dynamics threaten this power position. Nadar (2009) argues that when positional power is maintained as we can see from these examples and taken to extremes, it can lead to violence against women and other man. Research has showed that due to patriarchal bargaining and the positioning of men as superior gender and women as inferior, men resort to violence when they feel threatened and when their leadership positions are threatened (Sikweyiya, Addo-Lartey, Alangea, Dako-Gyeke, Chirwa, Coker-Appiah, Adanu & Jewkes, 2020, p. 1-11). In a study investigating domestic violence in Christian homes, Phiri (2001, p. 85-101) shows that women suffered some form of violence at the hands of their husbands who are faith leaders because they felt undermined by their wives. Feminist theory argues that violence against women or other marginalized men is never just about the violence, it's about

⁷ And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." ESV



exerting power (Hooks, 2015). In contextualizing GBV, feminist perspective views gender as an assumption of social power relations based on gender. Ackerman asserts that it is a critical perspective that challenged the patriarchal gender paradigm that associated males with human characteristics that are deemed superior and dominant whereas female is deemed inferior (Ackermann, 2006, p. 221-242).

From a feminist perspective, violence against women stems from a man's desire to attain and retain power over women (Ali & Naylor, 2013, p. 611-619). Patriarchy has placed men as superior and dominant over women, giving men the perception that they are entitled to women's bodies. Sikweyiya and colleagues (2020) in their investigation on patriarchy and gender inequitable attitudes as drivers to Intimate partner violence against women found that men often sexually abused their partners when they refused to have sex because they felt entitled. The below extract illuminates this sentiment.

“Oh I forced her I told her, ‘chaley [dude] today I feel oo’ so I want to have sex with her, but she said ‘chaley today I am tired’, but I said ‘oo what are you talking about, that is why I told you I am in love with you, you are my girl so you have to allow me to do it’, but as I said I had to force her ... yeah, about 3 months, 4 months I hadn’t had sex so (laughing). I forced her. (Abedi)”
(Sikweyiya et al, 2020, p. 11).

Sexual violence as demonstrated by the above extract is related to the concept of penetration used by men to dominate over women's bodies as an act of exercising power (McPhail, 2016, p. 314-329). According to Stewart, one of the characteristics that needs to be considered in the masculinity construction process is a man's ability to penetrate. He asserts that a man must be a penetrator, that a real man must be impenetrable, meaning that he must protect his body from being penetrated by any object. The man in the Might Men of Valour poster shows a man carrying a sword which is both used to penetrate and kill the opponent. The shield he uses is to prevent himself from being penetrated. Being impenetrable becomes important in maintaining one's masculinity status. To illustrate this penetration discourse, Fair (2011, p. 491-504) uses this discourse to illuminate the linguistic interconnections between misogyny, homophobia and construction of normative masculinity among adolescent boys who play rugby. He argues that wrestler's construction of masculinity is achieved through framing sexual relations as acts of dominance and subordination, and that the physical



aspects of the sport is symbolically equated to sexual penetration of men with femininity. Stewart and Fair's penetration discourse show that aggression is an essential characteristic in the construction and performance of masculinity, which ultimately is the embodiment of power.

Within the African context, as argued by Stewart (2016) penetration, and the ability to penetrate defines and affirms a man's masculinity. Hlatshwayo (2012) also asserts that penetration is what defines a man in patriarchal ideology. If you are not able to penetrate then your masculinity and manhood is questioned. The ideology of penetration as a masculine identifier has sparked a lot of debate regarding the masculinity status of gay men or men who have sex with men. Ratele (2011) argues that penetration cannot be confirmed within the heterosexual ideology of sex, because the penis is also used to penetrate other men and same-sex practices do not invalidate one's masculine identity.

Power in the second image of *Restoring the Man* is embodied through dress code and the positionality of these men against the background of a rock. In engaging these images, media theory and critical visual analysis offered tools to look beyond the image to understand the message. The rock in the second image in this context is analyzed as a reference to Matthew 16:18⁸ where Jesus is conversing with Peter telling him that He (Jesus) will build His church upon this rock. The rock in this context symbolizes strength, perseverance and resistance. The image embodies these characteristics in a non-threatening way and successful masculinity, positioning these men in a position of power and providers of their families.

According to Sikweyiya and colleagues, distinct gender roles between men and women are ingrained in an inflexible and unchanging culture. Men are considered to be providers or financiers of the family while women are delegated to domestic chores (Connell, 2002; Sikweyiya et al, 2020). The provider role is a key trait of traditional masculinity, stipulating that a man must provide for their family as part of their masculine performance (Sikweyiya et al, 2020) positioning a man to control the finances of the family. Religiously, a man as leader of his family is also tasked with the

⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.



responsibility of providing for his family as a fulfilment of biblical manhood principles (Van Klinken, 2013). Research has shown that socio-economic status is one of the factors contributing to violence against women (Jewkes, 2002, p. 1423-1429). According to Jewkes, women who have no financial income, financially dependent on their partners are at risk of experiencing violence from their male partner. This is evident in Sikweyiya and Colleagues study findings which shows that men used finances to control their women as they are solely designated to domestic work within the household and bring no income. They argue that it is the men's responsibility to be in charge of finance as providers. Phiri's study investigating domestic violence in Christian homes also found that money was used to control women and some resorted to stealing the money to get basic needs. The server consequence of this provider discourse imposed by patriarchy, religion and culture is that when a man fails to meet this expectation, he is viewed less of man and may resort to using violence to assert his masculinity.

“If the wife questioned the men's inability to provide for her and his children, men interpreted this as a direct assault on his masculinity and would use violence to temporarily reclaim his honour.” (Sikweyiya, 2020, p. 7).

In addition to this provider role, men are also expected to be leaders and heads of their families. Feminism has accused religio-cultural norms of perpetuating the ideology of male headship and leadership as another way of using discursive power to continually oppress women both culturally and religiously (Phiri, 2002; Nadar, 2002). Discursive power refers to the everyday language that we use to maintain binary oppositions of men being stronger than women while relational power works as a belief system that promotes hierarchal ideologies that makes it mandatory for men to be heads of their families and leaders in the community (Nadar, 2009, p. 554; Nadar & Potgieter, 2010, p.141-151). Nadar asserts that the theology of male headship and female submission has been used to reinforce hegemonic power and maintaining violence. In her engagement with Might Men Conference, she argues that we should be afraid of what men are taught in this conference because it is a subtle way of reinforcing patriarchy and urging man to take up their role as leaders.



Discursive power appeals to the religious language that we use in sermons or dialogue (Westenberg, 2017, p. 71). It relies on the authoritativeness of the Word of God which cannot be argued against nor denied. In defending their roles as leaders and heads of their family, men use the biblical reference of Ephesians 5 v22-23⁹ amongst others to maintain the hierarchal order where a man is superior and the woman is inferior and must submit to their husbands. Sikweyiya and colleagues further assert that men used this reference to subject women to their control, to dutifully perform their duties without questioning their authority. In contextualizing violence within the religious landscape, Takyi and Lamptey establish a link between GBV and religion, arguing that religious ideologies about male supremacy and dominance and a theology of submission found in religious sermons socialises men and women into gender power relations, reinforce gender ideology of men being superior to women (Takyi & Lamptey, 2020, p. 25-52). In her study with Christian women in Durban, Phiri (2002) found that women experienced violence and their husbands justified the violence through religious teaching about woman submission and male supremacy. The perceived lack of submission from woman often led to their abuse, the abuse propped as discipline. The perceived challenge to this hierarchal order and authority, men emotionally and physically abuse their female partners (Sikweyiya, 2020). Westerberg concurs with Phiri by further arguing that religious discourses such as male headship and leadership leads to men abusing the power bestowed upon them in their marriages. These discourses then embeds the idea that if a woman experiences abuse; it is because she failed to submit to her husband. Le Roux and colleagues argue that faith communities have often been a space where GBV can be condoned and even promoted through traditions and teachings (Le Roux et al, 2016, p.22). The ideology of male supremacy and headship within religious landscape perpetuates and sustains violence against women. The question then is, which aspect of manhood or masculinity that is being empowered or restored in these Pentecostal men conferences and what type of masculinity are they promoting?

⁹ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.



Pentecostalism and Masculinity

Given that men need restoration according to Restoring the Men conference, it connotes that there is something broken in men that needs restoration. Considering the religio-cultural discourse of masculinity, the theology of male headship and women's submission, they reinforce the patriarchal discourse of what it means to be a traditionally or culturally but also the biblical way of being a man. Pentecostalism or Pentecostal churches provide themselves in its theology of transformation through the doctrine of rebirth or born again (Kaunda, 2016, p.15-45). Pentecostalism is a branch of Christianity that emphasises on the apostolic pneumatological experience such as divine healing, prophesy and speaking in tongues (Mofokeng & Madise, 2019, p. 1-16; Kaunda & John, 2020, p. 1-16).

Pentecostal men construct their masculine identities according to the doctrine of rebirth/born again. Manglos (2010, p. 409-431) describes being born again or the process of rebirth as a change in moral practices which is understood as a transition to a moral lifestyle where an individual enters into close relationship with God. This breaking from the past means that men need to reconstruct their masculinity according to this new way of life, claiming an alternative male identity (Gabaitse, 2020, p. 67-80). This theological masculine identity is characterized by self-control, no womanizing, no drinking, no smoking, not cheating, and doing things that are in line with God's will. It is very much in line with religious capitalism, being a good worker and citizen. Though it seeks to transform men to be more accommodative and produce life-affirming masculinity (Chitando and Chirongoma, 2012, p. 1) it leaves no room for an alternative except for men to be patriarchal heads and dominate over women. The entrenchment of male dominance among born-again men creates grounds for performing masculinity of dominance that could result in violence against women (Gabaistse, 2020, p.76). Platforms such as men's conference perpetuate the ideology of male headship and leadership, subscribing to the patriarchal biblical interpretation. This is evident in Kennedy Owino's (2012, p. 65-84) investigation of the mighty men conference in which he found that the conception of this conference is innocent but also deadly in that it teaches men to uphold a position of power and dominance through leadership. This new masculine identity still functions within the confines of hegemonic masculinity,



this is where the complexity of this masculine identity lies. The reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity in religious landscape and the patriarchal framework that informs masculinity construction, leaving women and children vulnerable to experiencing violence.

The notions of power and dominance are prevalent in this production of masculinity in the promotional material. Media theory in understanding of image argues that these images are more than just promotional material, they are agents and actors who have the power to constrict social meaning through the engagement with the complex issues of masculinity (Morgan, 2014, p. 83-105). Male superiority and dominance in Christian spaces is propped up in the male leadership and headship discourse of masculinity. Pentecostals believe that it is a God-given order for men to be leaders and heads of households (Van Klinken 2011, p. 104-124). Therefore, this principle is entrenched among men in their construction of masculinity, and it creates ground for hegemonic masculinity performance that potentially threatens women through a theology of submission (Gabaitse, 2020, p. 67-80). Owino in his exploration of biblical manhood in the Mighty Men Conference argues that men are taught to uphold their position of power and dominance through leadership, endorsing the ideology of male headship and leadership according to the heteropatriarchal reading to the bible (Owino, 2012, p. 65-68). Nadar further demonstrates and argues that gendered conferences such as Mighty Men Conference promote male power through its discourses of masculinism that maintain and promote the superiority of men over women (Nadar, 2009, p. 551-561). She argues that this theology of male headship promotes violence against women through myths that a man must protect women and their families. These myths regarding masculinity reinforce masculine power within the religious landscape through discursive power and relational power. This promotional material not only highlights the deepest beliefs of masculinity within the Christian faith but also influences how Christian men must construct their masculinity

Conclusion

The pervasiveness of GBV in our society forces us to critically engage with dangerous and toxic masculinity that often informs and perpetuates this pandemic.



Against the backdrop of this crisis, this paper offered a theological reflection in the way which masculinity construction and production are to be understood in relation to GBV using men's conference promotional material. The critical engagement with this material shows the problematic representations and production of masculinity, which is represented through dominant patriarchal discourses of masculinity. The discourse of power and dominance are prominent in the promotional material which research has shown and urged that they are problematic in terms of understanding masculinity construction and performance. Furthermore, these discourses within a religious landscape where positive masculinities should be encouraged, reinforce hegemonic masculinity performance among born-again Christian men (Gabaitse, 2020). Though conceptualized innocently, these conferences have the potential to sustain dominant ideologies of gender, reinforcing gender norms and to encourage men to live up to their patriarchal expectations of masculinity. This gendered conference promotes a masculine ideal that fits the patriarchal mode yet propped up religion using discursive power.

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