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**Investigating White Hegemonic Masculinity Among SADF Veterans in Durban**

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## **Abstract**

In order to enforce apartheid at every level of South African society, the national party government required their white male security forces to share a uniform identity and ideology. This ideology relied on a hegemonic masculinity that would be willing to aggressively protect racism, patriarchy, and cultural conservatism. A whole generation of white men are now reckoning with living in an entirely new country, one where their white masculine identities are not able to be practiced in the same way as they were under an oppressive racist regime. This study will build on existing literature of masculinity in South Africa while contributing a unique perspective from a group that has been relatively understudied since the end of apartheid. A narrative research methodology will be utilized, requesting participants to reflect on their experiences while serving in the military and how these experiences have shaped their identities and social values. One on one interviews will prompt participants to answer questions not only about their lives as apartheid enforcers but about their opinions on issues regarding gender, sexuality, and race, locating how they view themselves in relation to other groups. The author will seek to answer whether or not the hegemonic masculinity instilled by the apartheid machine has continued to dominate how white men view and perform their identities. This research is vital for a generation of white men to reassess their roles in a new South Africa, and to contemplate how the legacy of years of apartheid rule still have a grip on their lives today.

## **Background**

Masculinity has been invariably tied to the military for centuries; the military, in societies across time and space, has positioned itself as the ideal space for men to enhance their masculine attributes and be socialized appropriately as men. Whether these attributes be violence,

competition, (hetero)sexual virility, or discipline, they have been instilled in countless men to perceive their own male identities in a very limited and traditional fashion (Hinojosa 2010). South Africa under apartheid is a prime example of the military taking on a role as a provider and incubator of prized masculinity. Those labels that deem a man socially ostracized and incapable of appropriately behaving as their designated gender- femininity, submissiveness, homosexuality, and weakness- are not tolerated in military environments, and are specifically stamped out by superiors to create a hegemonic masculinity among their recruits (Hinojosa 2010).

However, militarized masculinity is not a natural process in human society. Masculinity becomes militarized when it occurs in societies of strong state power and imperialism, and South Africa falls into both categories. No real evidence suggests that militant and violent behavior is a natural quality for men to embrace; history shows us that in nonstate societies war is a process that heavily involves both men and women (Hinojosa 2010). Both boys and men naturally avoid killing others, and it is the pressure enacted by state actors that coerce them into sacrificing their bodies and ethical inclinations for the state's interests. Uniformity lies in the heart of this coercion and directly contributes to the hegemonic masculinity that is formed. Uniform rules, haircuts, uniforms, expectations; it all creates an environment where difference is discouraged and the most celebrated behavior is that which is within the appropriate lines of what it means to be an obedient soldier (Dvorak 2018). The avenue by which to promote oneself within the stringent hierarchy is hard work, adherence to rules, and ability to outfight others, all qualities associated with hypermasculinity and by extent scales for one's success as a man. In the case of white apartheid-era South Africa, where loyalty to the state was everything, excelling during one's military service was the ideal way to prove oneself as a man and garner social capital.

At the core of the sustainment of the apartheid project was its incredibly organized and ruthless security forces, which were able to exercise control through terror to keep the country under white rule. As apartheid ramped up post 1948 there was a strong need for more soldiers to hold onto this control, and the government began mass conscriptions of young, able-bodied white men into the military. The conscription period, which was six months in the late 50's and 60's, was soon increased to nine months and eventually two years (Manyaki 2011). Conscription became a large influence in white South African culture, as it became the norm for young men to show off their masculine prowess and patriotism through accepting their call to serve in the military. Several young men who evaded being drafted through loopholes or leaving the country were looked down upon, labeled "cowards" or "faggots" for not being the military men the country asked them to be. A hero-like image of a strong and brave white soldier spread like wildfire, especially after special military operations by the SADF in Namibia and Angola (Mankayi 2011). The military became the premier institution through which white masculinity was rehearsed and performed, and serving your time of conscription was considered a crucial life stage to complete before moving into later adulthood and maturity. After serving in the SADF there was no more room for disagreeing with the National Party Government's ideology or policies; now you were a true patriotic white South African, ready to accept the societal order without question (Mankayi 2011).

Although South Africa is now 28 years removed from the apartheid system, the young white men that lived through its indoctrination and served under its military still must reckon with how their identities and values were shaped at such a critical point in their social development. Many remain in the country, learning to operate in a nation where a black elite is now in political control and those who served the apartheid system in any capacity are

commonly deemed unfit to live in the new South Africa. This study will seek to hear the stories of these men, to understand how they perceived their experiences as soldiers and how their worldview has been altered by these experiences to this day. Specifically, how did apartheid militaristic ideology shape ideas of masculinity among white men in security forces?

Interviewing the research participants about both their lives and their social attitudes will provide valuable information into how the military If this generation of men are to deal with their past and reconcile it with a new country, they must reflect on its legacy and question how their racial and gender identities have been informed by their experiences in the military. This study can contribute to the complicated process of reconciliation in a positive manner. There remains a gap in research on the identities of white veterans in South Africa, and in general a lack of knowledge in modern South African society of those who still live here and were once part of enforcing white rule, whether voluntarily or through conscription. It is the hope of this research to capture a glimpse into the lives of these men and how their white masculinity manifests itself as a generation with no apartheid government to fight for.

### **Objectives**

The central objective of this study is to analyze the life histories of a sample of white male veterans who served under the SADF, determining the extent to which their time as soldiers of the national party government influence how they perceive themselves as white men. This perception also involves how they locate themselves in relation to other groups, particularly women and black people in South Africa, to understand how the production of white masculinity relies on its self-perceived superiority to others. Essentially the research will seek to identify whether or not white veterans have held onto these notions that originated from apartheid, or if

they have developed their worldview and identities independent of their past. Questions about gender and masculinity will probe how the participants view “a man,” and what being a man includes and does not include. How stringent the participants define the category of “man” will be of particular interest in the study. Do they accept homosexuals, bisexuals, and straight men who defy traditional gender roles as equally “men”? Questions will also focus on how the participants view their time in the military; is this with regret or is it seen as an achievement? Do they feel their time as soldiers was significant for their development as men, or that they gained a lot of useful knowledge during this period? For those that do reflect on their time positively, the study will observe if there is a correlation between that positive outlook and continued notions of traditional white male masculinity that was practiced under apartheid.

If a majority of participants do not share these traditional notions, it can be deduced that the indoctrination of white masculinity sought by the NP government has not been sufficiently engrained to continue in these men through a new system and government. However, if their values remain aligned with militarized white masculinity, the saliency of indoctrination under the military will prove to be stronger than most would realize. Under both scenarios benefits can be found, however; if a majority have ruptured with the values instilled in them as soldiers, there is hope and perhaps direction as to how people can reclaim their worldviews and identities after indoctrination by an authoritative state. If the opposite is true, these men may find reward in being prompted to consider this legacy. And, academically, knowledge of how state-formed identities remain intact after regime change will be advanced. Other specific objectives include:

- Investigating if veterans perceived hegemonic masculinity being enforced during their time of service

- Exploring the treatment of those who did not fit into the mold of hegemonic masculinity in the military
- Questioning how white veterans have dealt with adjusting to a new society where they might feel a pressure to conceal their past experiences
- Exploring opinions of veterans on issues of gender and masculinity, sexuality, the culture of the military, and socio-political transition

### **Literature Review**

Scholarship revolving around white militarized masculinity in South Africa has been ongoing, even if contemporary accounts of former soldiers are few and far between. What has been mentioned more frequently in gender studies in South Africa is hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, a gendered ideology of men being the dominant sex and belonging within strict boundaries of hyper-masculinity, is the social attitude that prevailed among apartheid military environments in South Africa. Hegemonic masculinity first began being researched in a South African context with Raewyn Connell's theoretical work in the early 1990's (Morrell et al. 2012). Real interest in the field of gendered politics did not begin until 1994, when apartheid's downfall prompted closer investigations at the role of men in the system's oppression, especially white men. Robert Morrell further developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity in South Africa by splitting it into three categories: white, African, and black. Each influenced its respective demographic in unique ways, shaped by political, social, and economic circumstances. White hegemonic masculinity was considered a driving force in the conservative militarist ideology of the apartheid state, and particularly its security institutions.

This apartheid-era white masculinity had its origins in an English-influenced notion of masculinity, but had been gradually replaced by an Afrikaner-dominated concept of manhood (Morrell et al. 2012). This new understanding of masculinity enshrined a puritanical worldview, one that prioritized strict expectations of conduct and morals, social hierarchy, and mythology surrounding the Afrikaner frontier. This was the masculinity that dominated the military branches of apartheid, and served as justification for the stringent social separation and social conservatism for which apartheid is so infamous. In July of 1997 a Colloquium on Masculinities in Southern Africa was held at the University of Natal in Durban, where groundbreaking ideas of gender were discussed by leaders in the field (Morrell et al. 2012). “Man” was no longer understood as a neutral category, with hegemonic masculinity being portrayed as a threat to the safety and dignity of both women and men who did not fit into its strict boundaries. By the early 2000’s South Africa was a part of a global movement seeking to address the consequences of hegemonic masculinity. Academics agreed that intervention in the identities of white men could help “renegotiate” hegemonic masculinity. In more recent years white masculinity has become more popular as a field of study in South Africa, with two editions of *Psychology in Society* being devoted to masculinity in 2007 (Morrell et al. 2012). However, even as research on white masculinity has developed, little research focuses hegemonic masculinity as a core concept, and its applications in the South African military under apartheid remains an understudied field.

When it comes to how hegemonic masculinity manifested itself in military environments, Daniel Conway has studied how white men were able to portray themselves as ideal citizens and hypermasculine protectors of their country through military service. His work culminates in the finding that for many young white men, conscription was considered not a curse to run away

from but a “privilege” to utilize in order to achieve peak levels of respectable manhood, and by extent citizenship (Conway 2013). Even families were politicized to encourage this necessary installation of militarized masculinity; mothers and wives were socially conditioned to be welcoming of conscription in order for their men to become successfully integrated into white apartheid society. In fact, society coalesced around supporting the men who accepted their duty to serve, and those who did not take up arms were cut off from public spheres. These external pressures further created a perception that accepting one’s conscription was an opportunity for advancement and fulfillment rather than an unwelcome sacrifice. Moreover Conway is able to identify three levels of interconnected pressures that together were extremely successful at “militarizing white culture” (Conway 2013). At a local level, the family and even the school encouraged it for young men, where they learned about their duties as white men to be violent protectors of the apartheid system and white South African culture. Nationally, the government and military worked together to disseminate their policy of military service being the only appropriate channel for white men to practice true masculinity and patriotism, and internationally ideas of masculinity being reliant on military service increasingly circulated (Conway 2013).

After completing the first stage of conscription, rewards for this rite of passage abounded. Career opportunities presented themselves in the form of being able to join elite special units or conducting administrative work for the SADF. Employers saw a man who had finished his conscription to have acquired a certain set of advantages, including confidence, self-awareness, and independence (Conway 2013). Socially, they were both admired and respected by wider white culture. Differing mythical visions of former soldiers emerged; “troopies” became a common name to affectionately label soldiers who were masculine in a way that was celebrated but not threatening. They were the sons of South Africa, cherished by their parents and partners

as friendly yet strong figures. A differing icon emerged known as “grensvegter,” or border-fighter (Conway 2013). These were the soldiers that had spent time fighting on the borders of South Africa against the Communist threat, hailed for a more aggressive and intense masculinity than the troopies. These were the soldiers that truly inspired the utmost respect for their bravery, and were seen as practicing an even more sexualized and militarized masculine prowess. This image served to emasculate those who did not spend time fighting on the borders, creating a hierarchy where a grensvegter reached the very peak of male dominance (Conway 2013). The media played a crucial role in perpetuating these images, as newspapers and television consistently portrayed soldiers and veterans as the pride of South Africa.

Research into militarized masculinity has been relatively better explored when it comes to investigating younger men, as was the study conducted by Mankayi, who interviewed 14 men aged 23-33 about their experiences in the South African military. These men served in the military after 1994, but shared some similar conceptions of their role in it as apartheid-era soldiers, specifically the white subject (Mankayi 2011)s. Every white subject had a father who was drafted during apartheid, suggesting that these views of being a soldier were disseminated from the older generation. A common theme was viewing military service as a “calling,” not a job. White soldiers shared their frustration at those who saw the military as simply an opportunity for money or employment; to them, it was a dedicated way of living. They felt a need to join because of a feeling of social and civic responsibility, and this outlook signified how their lives, and therefore identities as white men, relied heavily on their labels as soldiers. Interestingly, the black participants did not cite duty as their primary reason for joining the military but instead economic opportunity (Mankayi 2011).

Mankayi's writing also explored the changing racial dynamics of the South African military after 1994 as they began accepting black recruits into higher positions. A white exodus of soldiers occurred following this integration, as whites who felt too superior to fight alongside black colleagues no longer gained the same sense of fraternal belonging as they once did under all-white regiments (Mankayi 2011). One white research participant shared, "a lot of whites have left. It just becomes too difficult to be a white man in the army these days...a lot of them do not really want to work with the blacks" (Mankayi 2011). Statements like these suggest many white soldiers continued to operate under an apartheid era mindset of exclusive white militarized masculinity, and left when this historically-rooted mindset was challenged. However, not all white subjects share this view, as evident by research subject Jeff. He denounced the classifications put on soldiers based on race, emphasizing individuality and showing his own willingness to fight alongside other ethnic groups. "I personally see people as individuals ... I've been classified due to a corrupt system, although it cannot be proven, but it's a system that's placed that classification, like black, African, coloured, Indian, on an individual" (Mankayi 2011). Black soldiers were not the only "others" Mankayi's study discussed, but also gay soldiers. One subject shared an anecdote of how army men would joke with navy men, saying their white uniforms made them look like "a bunch of gay guys." One soldier, Sam, put it in concise words: "You can't be a soldier if you are a homosexual" (Mankayi 2011).

More modern research has delved into the treatment of homosexual soldiers who served in the apartheid defense forces, furthering understanding of how those outside traditional notions of masculinity were severely punished. One such report, "The Aversion Project," exposes the crimes of healthcare workers in the apartheid military who conducted widespread human rights abuses against gays and lesbians. A number of soldiers were interviewed as a part of this report,

both heterosexual and homosexual, being asked to share their experiences and observations during their service (Van Zyl et al. 1999). The result is a detailed account of the egregious treatment homosexual (and suspected homosexual) soldiers endured under the SADF, and a historical narrative that conveys the real dangers of hegemonic masculinity in the South African military.

The hegemonic masculinity in the SADF, just like hegemonic masculinity everywhere, relied on subverting the feminine in order to empower itself; this resulted in any soldier displaying signs of femininity to be subsequently “othered.” This undoubtedly centered on homosexual soldiers, whose very existence in the armed forces was seen as a threat to the dominant Afrikaner masculinity the military sought to instill. Hegemonic masculinity was supplemented by overarching ideologies of Afrikaner Christianity to facilitate a uniquely homophobic environment, even compared to other militaries. According to major Afrikaner Churches such as the Dutch Reform Church, which had been using its moral authority to justify apartheid for decades, the SADF gained its legitimacy from God (Van Zyl et al. 1999). It was the religious imperative of white citizens to uphold Afrikaner white supremacy, and the duty of military commanders to “protect” impressionable young soldiers from the dangers of homosexuality. Consequently the military constructed a series of special wards designed to hold those who strayed from acceptable behavior. It was in the late 1960’s that a new ward was built specifically for those with “psychological” problems, including homosexuals. A number of patients and medical personnel from this ward and others were interviewed, all of whom spent time in these wards during the period from 1971 to 1985 (Van Zyl et al. 1999). These interviews made it clear that the “psychological” problems the wards claimed to treat were simply occurrences of behavior not considered conducive to the success of the apartheid war effort.

These included conscripts who had resisted to being enlisted in active service, as well as those who objected to the SADF's operations on a moral grounding against apartheid. Military psychiatrists declared these outliers "disturbed," detaining them along with homosexuals and drug users. In these wards an estimated 10-15% of beds belonged to homosexual soldiers (Van Zyl et al. 1999).

Even as the rest of the western medical world made substantial progress in its view of homosexuality, medical professionals in the SADF continued to use antiquated practices in relation to gay conscripts. These practices included the widespread use of aversion therapy to "cure" gay patients. This was done through a combination of electrocution and image association, with homosexual images being followed up by shocking (Van Zyl et al. 1999). This continued long after the United Kingdom declared aversion therapy to be ineffective in 1967. It was clear that apartheid medical professionals were no longer adhering to international standards; they ignored the Tokyo Convention of which they were a signatory, which prohibited doctors from using methods of torture. Instead they were expected to follow the rules of the apartheid government first, casting aside medical ethics, regulations, and professional councils to do the bidding of the National Party's military machine (Van Zyl et al. 1999).

Despite sodomy being criminalized starting in 1968 in South Africa, the apartheid military preferred to deal with acts of homosexuality in their own ranks; when it wasn't through detaining and torturing gay soldiers in psychiatric wards, it was through cultivating an environment that was deeply hostile to anyone suspected of homosexuality (Van Zyl et al. 1999).. Lectures were given to new recruits outlining the seven capital offenses that called for military execution, one of which was homosexuality. From the start any effeminacy or weakness was associated with homosexuality, with gay slurs being used on any soldier who did not

perform well under the hegemonic masculine model. Those who were suspected of actually being gay were met with cruel harassment. One soldier shares, “During basics, the humiliation of gays was very, very common. They were called awful names like *holnaaier, poefter, moffie* ... They were often made the scapegoat” (IV 14:2) (Van Zyl et al. 1999). However, being gay was not an exemption from conscription by any means. The apartheid military saw gay men, while not desirable soldiers, as acceptable “cannon fodder.” While some gay soldiers were able to stay discreet and complete their duties successfully, many succumbed to the pressure of a deeply homophobic system and committed suicide (Van Zyl et al. 1999). Several closeted gays resorted to enacting homophobic violence on other gay soldiers to divert attention from themselves. Bullying between soldiers and from commanders could be particularly brutal for gay men. The hegemonic masculinity of the apartheid military, enforced by conservative Afrikaner religion and culture, became internalized in so many soldiers that they were unmerciful in their retribution for all nontraditional forms of masculinity and sexuality. Still, not all soldiers treated their homosexual comrades with hostility; some who were already critical of the apartheid regime supported gay conscripts as a form of protest against the system. Homosexual soldiers were such a threat to what the apartheid regime was attempting to create that supporting their very existence became an inherently political act (Van Zyl et al. 1999).

Stephen Symons conducted a study similar to Manyaki in which he interviewed 20 men, including former conscripts of the SADF and men who avoided conscription for a variety of reasons, both medical and ethical. He explored family dynamics, including paternal and maternal influences and how they incubated masculine desires to fulfill social obligation through conscription. He found that fathers carried with them mythical ideals of the army making their boys into men, even if the fathers themselves had no military experience and instead internalized

this rhetoric from World War II and Korean War veterans (Symons 2020). Any regret or sorrow mothers felt at their sons going into the military was mitigated by their own subordination to men in apartheid society. What they wanted did not matter when it came to the life trajectories of their sons, yet many soon experienced a pride mingling with their sorrow. They were proud to see their sons grow up, be brave and fight for their country (Symons 2020). He also explored the role of schooling in white male indoctrination, similar to Conway. He found that schools and the military collaborated effectively to embed attitudes of racism early on for white males, enacting psychological fear over losing the country to the black threat (Symons 2020). Schools specifically espoused an Afrikaner, Calvinist centered ideology, that held up Boers as the chosen people and designated rulers over the native black population. Regional education departments and the SADF worked together to create a series of cadet programmes that would have white males prepared for their inevitable military service later on. By the time of secondary graduation, white men had been raised to be the perfect, violently masculine orchestrators of the apartheid regime (Symons 2020).

When looking at how ex-conscripts remember their militaristic childhoods and time in the SADF, Symons found memories that are deeply complicated and continually in conflict with modern day. Internalized apartheid-era ideologies continue to persist as a result of a self-percieved loss of place and use in the new South Africa for these white men. Several of his participants shared their unwillingness to discuss their past at all, and that they can only converse about their military days with other white veterans. While nostalgia remains for many former soldiers, this nostalgia is coupled with a deep moral guilt that causes them to stay silent about their past. Censorship was harsh for ex-conscripts as well; the government placed firm controls on what veterans could divulge for “reasons of military security” (Doherty 2015). This

enforcement of silence in order to protect the image of the apartheid state left a legacy of secrecy for many veterans even decades later (Doherty 2015). However, silence does not signify nonexistence, and Symons argues it is undoubtable that the early identity-shaping events of a past long gone still have a large sway over their current worldview (Symons 2020). Some have sought endlessly to forget their past and the emotional distress they associate it with. One soldier divulges: “On one level, I want to forget that I’m white, that I grew up in white apartheid South Africa, went to a white school, went to a largely white university was called-up into a white army. All this stuff about race has exhausted me over decades...” (Symons 2020). This exhaustion felt by the subject is emblematic of the wider fatigue white veterans share after years of attempting to reconcile the guilt of their past with the uncertainty of their future. He goes on to say he is considering leaving the country, which countless white South Africans have done in waves since 1994 (Symons 2020).

Aside from research on specifically South African militarized masculinity, militarized masculinity in general has been studied in a variety of different contexts. Greg Dvorak discusses the more general concept in his article “Masculinities and Militarization.” Dvorak identifies common themes of militarized masculinity that transcend national lines. It is universally prevalent for it to lead to violence, sexually and physically, against both men and women. It does not tolerate homosexuality tainting its ranks. When women join this masculine environment, they suffer from widespread cases of rape and assault (Dvorak 2018). Additionally, practicing militarized masculinity serves to calm the anxieties felt by men in society, including the concerns of feminization as a result of white collar work and urbanization. This concept can certainly apply to South Africa under apartheid, not only for these feminizing factors but also anxieties over losing the country to black people (Dvorak 2018). Practicing robust military masculinity

grants white men a sense of power over these fears. This study will build on established ideas about the dangers of militarized masculinity in general, while simultaneously helping to fill a gap in knowledge about the current feelings and attitudes of older white men who once fought for the apartheid government.

### **Methodology**

The study involved qualitative research through the use of one-on-one interviews. I utilized a narrative approach, exploring the life histories of the participants and analyzing their experiences through a gender and masculinity lens. Questions focused on various stages of the lives of participants, including their upbringing, their time during the military, and their experience after leaving the SADF. The interviews were semi-structured in format, with several predetermined questions asked while also leaving room for participants to share what they wanted to share. Conversations would routinely drift off from the course of the questioning in a casual manner, while participants sifted through their memories of the past and discussed whatever came up in their minds. Along with sharing their life histories they were asked to answer questions regarding social attitudes, mainly in terms of gender and masculinity. Among these questions included what they thought of manhood, or who they believed should be allowed to serve in the military.

Participants were difficult to locate due to the relatively sparse population of white veterans in the Durban area, especially when considering how few would be willing to unearth traumatic and perhaps shameful memories of the past. Two participants were located using the social networks of my advisor, and two more were gathered from these two through a snowball sampling method. A total of four participants is identified as a limitation to the study, being a

small sample from which to generalize about all SADF white veterans. However, each interview was long, in-depth, and probing, gathering large amounts of pertinent information and anecdotes. Additionally, interviewees shared glimpses of general life in their respective military settings, divulging stories about soldiers they knew, and events that had taken place they had heard of from others. These anecdotes assisted in broadening the scope of data for the study, supplying stories of several soldiers they knew that I was unable to interview.

Another limitation to the study is the background and politics of each of my interviewees. Three of the four came from self-identified liberal families, which certainly impacts how these men grew up thinking about masculinity and gender. Today these participants were notably more liberal than most of their age and race counterparts would be, affecting how they dealt with questions about their current social attitudes regarding masculinity and manhood. Still, they come from a diverse range of backgrounds, some coming from upper middle class families and some from lower middle class ones. Additionally, one was homosexual, and they all served in slightly different periods of the SADF, with different duties assigned to them. Some reflected on their military careers with indifference, while others were clearly traumatized and struggled to discuss what they had gone through. These contrasts were able to offer a multitude of viewpoints for the study. Three of these men hailed from the Glenwood area particularly, with one being located in Hillcrest, both historically white (but increasingly diverse) affluent suburbs of Durban.

The interviews were conducted under a non-judgemental atmosphere; careful effort was taken to avoid any framing that would place guilt or blame on these men, keeping in mind their forced position into the SADF. Beliefs or attitudes were not assumed, and each participant answered the same questions about social attitudes and gender. The potential trauma of the participants was also considered; each participant was informed that they did not need to speak

about anything they did not wish to, and that the recording could be paused at any moment should they need a break. Open-ended questions allowed participants to answer with flexibility and autonomy, not being led to answer a certain way. Finally, it was made apparent that all names would be kept strictly anonymous, and that no one needed to know that they were the ones divulging their personal stories from a sensitive time.

## **Primary Research**

### *Introduction to Study*

Twenty eight years after the SADF was disbanded, many of the white men who once filled its ranks are difficult to locate; waves of white flight from the country have emptied much of this population from South Africa, especially those who were unsympathetic to a new ANC government post-1994. Those that have remained are living in a vastly different country than the one they grew up and served in. Many white veterans do not wish to discuss their past, burdened by the guilt of serving the apartheid government (even if it was forced through conscription) and traumatized by the harsh environment that was the apartheid military. However, several veterans have been able to integrate themselves successfully into a new South Africa, abandoning the ideologies enforced on them by the apartheid military and embracing new ideals of democracy and equality. During the course of these interviews the participants were forced to confront their past and analyze how their military experiences might have a continued impact on their identities today. Integration does not signify an erasure of the past's effects for these men, who were the victims of a well-oiled ideological machine seeking to enforce hegemonic masculinity at every level of their person.

Several themes emerged in interviewing the participants, who were asked to share the details of their military experience and answer questions regarding their attitudes toward gender and masculinity. In “Groomed to be a Soldier,” the upbringing of the participants is investigated closely; through school, family, and their wider social networks, these men were raised to fulfill their inevitable fate of becoming a servant for the apartheid regime. In “Afrikaner Conservatism as Ruling Ideology,” the role of Afrikaner identity, language, and beliefs are discussed, all of which were placed at the forefront of the military and directed the environment white veterans entered into after their conscription. “Victims of Hegemonic Masculinity” introduces the experiences and memories participants divulged about their time as soldiers, including everything from how they were treated by superiors and fellow conscripts to observations they gathered of other soldiers and the wider culture they were forced into. Finally, “Being a Real Man: Investigating Gendered Attitudes” tackles how the participants perceive their own identities as white men. Participants were asked to consider how they have integrated into a new South Africa and the associated challenges of this transition. Together, these four categories paint a detailed picture of the ways these men reckoned with being forced into a social role designated for them from the start of their lives.

*Participant Biographies\**

*\*for the sake of anonymity, false names will be used throughout the course of this paper*

**Wayne**, 51, born in Durban, conscripted in 1991 after dodging the draft for several years and sent to Ladysmith for basic training for six months. After basic training he was sent to Natal Command for another six months, where he worked in the kitchen.

**Winston**, 56, born in Durban; an acquaintance of Wayne, he was also at Ladysmith for basic training

**Derrick**, 65, born in Pietermaritzburg; he served as a medic after applying for non-combatant status due to his pacifist beliefs.

**Stanley**, 61, born in Durban, was conscripted in 1978 at the age of 17 to Bloemfontein, before being transferred to 4VRP in Pretoria. He later would serve in 10 different camps in his yearly conscription until 1989.

### *Groomed to be a Soldier*

For the veterans I interviewed, as well as millions of white men living under South African apartheid, the apartheid regime did not wait until military conscription to begin its work of indoctrination. Apartheid has been described as a “cradle to coffin” system, affecting an individual at every life stage, and that was no different for white men as well. Even the men I interviewed who grew up in liberal families were still affected by the educational curriculum and wider social culture they were exposed to that was essentially unavoidable. There was a sense of inevitability among my interviewees growing up; that is, it being inevitable that one day they would become soldiers for the apartheid regime. It was perceived as less something to fear and avoid and more something to accept as your fate; many even looked forward to the day they would join the military, seeing it as a necessary and exciting milestone into manhood. Winston grew up with this feeling of inevitability.

Winston: You’ll also remember socially you, you grow up at school with your peers and everyone expected you to go to the military. So 90%, 80 to 90% of my friends at school, it was a known thing, you would go to the military and you all go together because you have to go.

Some conscripts would be raised by parents who glamorized the military as an event in which their sons would emerge as mature and independent men. Winston also shares such a story.

Winston: So, my mum was a believer like her generation that the army will probably do good because you go in there and you sort out, you know, like you can be a lazy guy sitting on a couch most of the time, with an attitude as a teenager and that thing like made you learn how to fold your own clothes and wash your own shoes, or that kind of thing. And generally in her age, a lot of her friends and the social culture was you can't escape it, you've got to go to some time.

Stanley also shared that both him and his twin Bruce always knew they had to go do national service, even if it stayed in the back of their minds. He explains that some families had the resources, whether it be monetary or through dual citizenship, to get their sons out of the country when it came time for conscription, but for "regular" families like his own their only real option was to serve, unless they wanted to face a five year prison sentence. Not all families shared a positive view of joining the SADF, however; in fact, most of my interviewees came from families that either did not speak of the military, or thought of it in negative terms. This is an unusual sample and not as common as my interviews would suggest, it being a limitation of my study that most of my interviewees hail from more liberal family backgrounds. Still, it is important to note that some families did not embrace their sons going off to the SADF, and how the wider white South African society was able to impose its own views on them regardless. One channel a few cited was through cadet programs, conducted for young boys in secondary schools where they would be given uniforms and undergo military-like rituals. Winston shares his experience of the cadet program.

Winston: You know when you're at school they have a thing called cadets.

I: Right.

Winston: I don't know if anyone has talked to you about that, but from an early age, I think standard eight or standard seven, 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..

Winston: It was sort of the preparation of people at the school level to get to easily.. More easily inducted into the military, right, to the south african defense force..

Even if the cadet program wasn't a direct ideological brainwashing, it inducted young boys into the formal, ritualistic environment of the military and got them acclimated to their future role as soldiers. There would also be a rigid discipline during these programs ensuring the boys were performing adequately, similar to the discipline they would later have to encounter in the military. Stanley shares how he stepped out of line during a cadet program and faced the consequences.

Stanley: If you were sloppy they would whip you... I remember one incident with um... One of my 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...

Stanley: It was from, I think it was from standard 8, we must have been 14...

Stanley proceeds to share that he broke the cane in two, which resulted in him receiving another caning from the assistant principal. Already young boys were being groomed to achieve perfection in their presentation and to fit in with the wider crowd, being physically or verbally abused if they failed to do so. Being exposed to an authoritarian atmosphere during the cadet programs was a strategy to ease these young men into a military-like environment, an inevitability waiting for almost all of them as soon as they completed matriculation.

For the boys who were raised directly in contradiction to the propaganda goals of the apartheid machine, being forced to serve them through conscription was all the more horrifying. Derrick came from such a background, having a liberal Quaker mother who abhorred violence, as well as the policies of the conservative white government. He describes her below.

Derrick: She was a member of the Black Sash.

I: What was the Black Sash?

Derrick: You've just got to find out.

I: Yeah. Hahaha

Derrick: Uhm, I'm just trying to think why it was called the Black Sash. It was, it came from, it was almost like sufferegates.

I: Oh, wow, nice.

Derrick: So they were a group of people, women who had different beliefs and, and ya so, I was raised up in that, that, that family background...

The Black Sash, being a human rights organization comprised of liberal white women that fought apartheid, was a unique organization for a white woman to be involved in at the height of apartheid South Africa to say the least. Derrick grew up with the guidance of his pacifist and progressive mother, and hated the idea of being forced to kill people; he therefore applied for non-combatant status, and was sent to be a medic in Kimberley. Men with backgrounds like Derrick faced an identity-shattering crisis as they were forced to participate in the very regime they were taught to fear and detest. However, even if his mother offered another perspective, Derrick had been raised as a young white man in apartheid South Africa, with all the associated societal pressures and expectations. Whether it be through cadets at school, the military ambitions of fellow classmates, or the wider social ideals of what being a white man meant at the time, Derrick like so many others was pressured by his society to accept his fate. And, whether he liked it or not, his country had groomed him to be a soldier.

### *Afrikaner Conservatism as Ruling Ideology*

The kind of hegemonic masculinity enforced by the apartheid regime in its defense forces was widely influenced by Afrikaaner identity, which itself was supplemented by the dogma of conservative Afrikaaner churches. In the SADF hegemonic masculinity therefore had a distinct

Afrikaaner tinge, revolving around common patterns in Afrikaaner culture such as rigid hierarchy, strict morals and hard work, and religious social conservatism. This also manifested itself in the use of language, and the priority treatment given to those conscripts that could claim Afrikaaner heritage and identity. Apartheid was planned, executed, and enforced primarily by the Afrikaaner government and people, and many of the top officials in the military were of Afrikaner descent, not English. This is confirmed by Winston.

Winston: “The non commissioned officers, that’s everybody with a stripe, so you go from corporal all the way to sergeant, then all the way up, and then they were mostly Afrikaans, the “tough guys”...

The result of competing masculinities and a prevailing Afrikaner masculinity meant there was an intersection of language and culture in how new conscripts were perceived and treated, and how hegemonic masculinity enforced itself on an individual soldier. Each of my interviewees were asked about their own ethnic background, as well as answering the question: “Did you feel that Afrikaaner culture and values were particularly influential in the military?”

Each of my four interviewees had at least some English background, albeit three of them also claimed Afrikaner heritage jointly. However, speaking English as your first language was already a source of contempt for the Afrikaner upper officers, and the military became an environment in which Afrikaans was the go-to language of communication, not English. Wayne, born of an Afrikaans mother and English father, shares how he had to acclimate to a more Afrikaner-influenced atmosphere in the military.

Wayne: “Even the sort of slang that becomes the lingua franca in the army.. that all tends to be Afrikaans, even amongst us English speakers, we just kind of adopted that very easily...

Winston, also of mixed heritage, describes a similar situation of Afrikaans dominating over English in the SADF.

Winston: The language would often be in Afrikaans, and it would be a lot of um anti-sentiment against English people...

Winston: If you couldn't speak Afrikaans it would be very difficult...

The reality that Afrikaans was required to be taught in schools meant that most conscripts at least had the basic language knowledge to adapt to an Afrikaans-speaking atmosphere, as Wayne was able to. There was little resistance to make English the primary language of the army; while South African society had seen English and Afrikaner masculinities compete with one another for decades, Afrikaner masculinity had succeeded as the premier white masculinity in the country, especially in hyper-masculinized environments like the military. With this cultural victory, Afrikaner masculinity determined the values of the military as well as its language and culture. Afrikaner ideals of hierarchy and rigid conduct, while already prevalent in a usual military atmosphere, were accentuated further. English speaking boys were frequently seen as less desirable soldiers because of their differing cultural values and social beliefs. Winston, also born of an Afrikaans mother and English father, describes the different treatment English conscripts would face.

Winston: "So if you're English you get um.. You get kind of ostracized, 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..."

Winston: And if your foot is over the carriage, everybody has to jump up whatever they're doing and stand in attention looking forward. And so then, the language would often be in Afrikaans, and it would be a lot of empty sentiment against English people.

I: Interesting.

Winston: And they would use a lot of terminology like &quot;Jou Engels Man&quot;, you Englishman, something from the beach, we&#39;re going to work you. If you couldn't speak Afrikaans, it was very difficult and some people couldn't.

The negative assumptions Winston divulges Afrikaaner officers would hold very much align with the cultural differences between Afrikaner and English South Africa. Afrikaner society idealized formality and strict conduct, and English conscripts were seen as unable to adhere to these expectations because of their background. Therefore, the "beach bum," "longish hair," and "lax t-shirt" stereotypes signify this attitude. Afrikaner officers sought to "work" English boys, training them to dispel the laziness and disobedience they were assumed to possess. Stereotypes also abounded depending on the region conscripts hailed from, often carrying ethnic undertones as well. Durban is a prime example, a large cosmopolitan coastal city more associated with an English South African culture and lifestyle. Wayne shares how his hailing from Durban also impacted the officer's view of him.

Wayne: There was an aggression... underlying aggression towards anything really that you could put a label on.. So you know Durbanites, they were a this or a that..."

I: Why Durbanites?

Wayne: "Because you smoke marijuana... and hang out with black people."

Again, the negative assumptions of Durbanites points to cultural factors that separated Afrikaner and English culture. Smoking marijuana represents the perceived informality and immorality of the English by the Afrikaners, and hanging out with black people pointing to the higher rates of social conservatism among the Afrikaner community and their distaste for the sometimes more socially liberal English. Among more early conscripts, the separation of the two

ethnic groups in the military was even more pronounced, as evident by the narrative of Stanley, who served in the SADF a full decade before either Winston or Wayne.

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..

Stanley: 1SSB was a very very bad place... you weren't allowed to speak english, you um.. The first three days they starved us...you've got to remember that time 78-79 was like the country was coming apart.. It was probably the worst time..

Stanley's experience highlights how the Afrikaner ranked officers were even more fervent in their enforcement of Afrikaner culture and values, fully banning the use of English at 1SSB in Bloemfontein, a city in the heart of Afrikaner South Africa. The deliberate separation of the English and Afrikaner boys conveys how officers would routinely utilize labels and categories to split up conscripts, pulling specific types of soldiers from designated categories; for the Afrikaner boys, they would be the ideal soldiers, being raised in a more conservative and rigid atmosphere and therefore deemed more suitable for leadership and combat roles. The English boys, on the other hand, would need to be molded more deliberately into desirable soldiers, facing a strong Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity seeking to turn them into war machines even if they would make up mostly the lower positions in the army.

### *Victims of Hegemonic Masculinity*

While hegemonic masculinity had been exercising itself in various forms on these conscripts since their childhood, it was during their time in the military that they truly became victims of the Afrikaner-influenced hegemonic masculinity that the apartheid regime thrived on. Upon entry into the SADF these men faced enormous pressure to be the exact type of man and

soldier the regime desired, with dire consequences for those who were unable to fit the mold. Afrikaner culture, as discussed, played a significant role in shaping this mold to be characterized especially by strong conservative beliefs, strict conduct, and ability to navigate the social hierarchy. They wanted soldiers who could display peak manhood, being strong and athletic while also subservient to their superiors and willing to exercise the regime's violent will with no remorse. Several of my interviewees did not meet these expectations, this bringing verbal abuse and social ostracization from the ranked officers.

Wayne, who had never wanted to join the military and grew up in a liberal family, did not enjoy being told what to do. He also had qualities that made him more of a target for ridicule from the officers. He was vegetarian and inquired about vegetarian food options, a mostly unheard of phenomenon in the military. This defined him as slightly different from the crowd, and anything different than the norm was a magnet for harassment. He was also not in a regular combat role but worked in the kitchen. Any work not including combat was automatically devalued under ideas of hegemonic masculinity, but working in the kitchen was on one of the lowest rungs of the hierarchy because of its perceived femininity. Wayne shares:

Wayne: The picking on.. Was more aimed at anyone who was perceived to be slightly weaker than anyone else.. You know that weakness could be framed negatively in many different ways. Like, They called us who-who worked in the kitchen *kombuis haas* for instance.. Which means uh.. Direct translation would be "kitchen rabbit," the rabbit being very much a gay term.. So if you even worked in the kitchen you were perceived to be gay."

Rhetoric such as *kombuis haas* was used as a tool of hegemonic masculinity, weaponizing homophobia and sexism by attaching these labels to those deemed less masculine and placing them lower on the social hierarchy. Another term commonly thrown around was *moffie*, another gay slur used to single out and punish perceived weakness.

I: Okay. So I know a moffie is a gay slur, correct? It's a gay slur. Yeah? And so was that directed towards just kind of anyone? Like it wasn't just gay soldiers, or just anyone who was effeminate basically was it just kind of tossed around?

Winston: No, it was largely directed to anybody that might even exhibit anything like that. Okay. If you weren't it wasn't necessary that you were somebody who had that. But if you didn't, 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 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.

Again we see hegemonic masculinity at play; anything outside of the heterosexual norm is devalued because of the ideology's reliance on subverting the feminine to elevate the strict masculine. *Moffie* was a tool to point out those that failed to follow hegemonic masculinity, regardless of whether the recipient of the slur was actually homosexual. We see here that expressing emotion is also associated with being a *moffie*, dismissing crying as a feminine act that a real soldier should not do. Those that were perceived as weak or more effeminate were harassed even if they were heterosexual, and those that were clearly homosexual faced even worse treatment.

Winston: So yeah. So those guys got like worked harder. They got like, you know, they got laughed at, they were a bit 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, the psychology I think of these noncommissioned 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.

I: Definitely.

Winston: 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. And some of it, 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. Right. So that does happen.

Winston reveals how hegemonic masculinity operates; by singling out the perceived weak and unmanly, and using the pressure and harassment of the wider group to deride these men. By outlining publicly that which fails to meet hegemonic masculine standards, in this case being a gay man, the boundaries of masculinity are clearly set and reenforced through a uniting against the vulnerable minority. Stanley and his identical twin, both being homosexual, sensitive young teenage boys when they were conscripted in 1978, faced the full brunt of the SADF's homophobic and toxically masculine culture.

Stanley: Yeah, we were worse off because we were gay.

I: Right.

Stanley: 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.

I: Wow, so this was after you had left?

Stanley: During our first three weeks.

I: Oh, during the first three weeks? Okay.

Stanley: 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: Military hospital?

Stanley: Military hospital, yeah. I mean, I can still smell that hospital and I can still see the blood on the floor because they would never clean it...

Stanley and his twin became prime targets for increased levels of harassment because of their perceived homosexuality and sensitivity, to the extent where physical abuse amounted to Bryan's hospitalization after only a few weeks in the military. Both twins were under enormous mental stress because of the violent military environment they were forced into; when Stanley was disconnected from his twin and couldn't locate him, the stress became so much so that he

attempted suicide by ingesting numerous cleaning supplies. He also ended up in the military hospital. Stanley and Bryan were prime victims of hegemonic masculinity, artistic and emotional young men that the apartheid military deemed unacceptable under the terms of hegemonic masculinity. Upon visiting his twin in the hospital, Stanley encounters another victim of hegemonic masculinity.

Stanley: And then I met Bruce. In the bed next to Bruce, was another young guy who I knew was homosexual.

I: Right.

Stanley: And we didn't know the word gay yet.

I: Right.

Stanley: And I went to talk to him, he looked so ill this boy. He tried to take his life as well.

I: Wow.

Stanley: 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...

Being gay in the SADF was to live a life of hiding, and if you were found out or even suspected, a life of absolute hell. Many homosexual conscripts experienced so much abuse that they turned to suicide, with the boy in the bed adjacent to Bryan another example of how gay men suffered in the SADF. The military hospitals that so many gay conscripts ended up in did not supply real psychiatric help but instead were hotspots for abuse, torture through conversion therapy, and even murder. Stanley and his twin Bryan had decided to disclose their sexuality to their psychiatrist, with a disastrous reaction.

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...

I: You told the psychiatrist?

Stanley: We told them straight.

I: 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 psychiatrists in the employment of the SADF placed the agenda of the conservative apartheid regime above all medical and moral obligations, shaming and abusing the very vulnerable young men they were supposed to treat. Those that were able to put up a convincing front of masculinity had the best chance of survival. This is exactly what Stanley had to do in order to protect himself and his twin. He became aggressive with a rough exterior as a survival mechanism, and this aggression that he developed continued with him after his first stint of conscription ended.

Stanley: You know, in my twenties, I was a monster. I was an aggressive young boy. I was a fitness fanatic. I mean, up until I was 48, I had a body to die for. And I was, I was really. And I used that as a tool.

The suffering, anger, and danger Stanley lived through during his time in the SADF affected his personality permanently. I asked each interviewee whether or not people in their life had commented on changes in them after they returned from the SADF, and only Stanley remembered someone commenting on a change within him that was not superficial. He shared:

Stanley: You went in boys, and you came out broken. That's basically what you hear from mom. And it was kind of what you heard from most people.

Stanley's memory of his mom reacting to differences in himself and his twin stands in stark contrast to the changes most parents expected their boys to go through during their conscription period. The general belief, highly facilitated by the SADF and apartheid government, was that the military would make boys into men. However, Stanley's story reveals that being outside the limits of strict hegemonic masculinity in the SADF resulted in serious and lasting trauma. He went into the army young, innocent, and gentle, but emerged as a young man

with anger and aggression issues. These issues surfaced at various points in his life, including when his father's store was being robbed.

Stanley: I looked over the fence and my dad had gone down to confront him and he was attacking my dad. I tell you James 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 very meek and mild-mannered guy, ya know?

I: 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 asked me to come to court. He was charged. He only got a very light sentence. I mean, I felt so terrible. And I realized that was when I was 19, when I realized 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.

It was moments like these that Stanley realized his trauma from the SADF was still impacting him and his behavior. Militarized masculinity had left its deep imprint on Stanley, turning a small part of him into the aggressive and vicious machine the SADF had wanted him to be all along. The victims of hegemonic masculinity in the SADF were not victims for a year or two of conscription but will be for the rest of their lives. Constant abuse, harassment, and indoctrination permanently altered the way countless men viewed the world and their own identities. However, even amid this environment, some conscripts were able to hold onto their independent beliefs, processing ideas of gender and masculinity in ways they were taught not to. In the final section, these gendered attitudes among former conscripts will be explored.

### *Being a Real Man: Investigating Gendered Attitudes*

After analyzing the upbringing of my interviewees, as well as the ideologies they witnessed and the ways hegemonic masculinity exercised itself on them during their service, I sought to evaluate the impact of this hegemonic masculinity on their modern attitudes about

gender. A surprising result was that my interviewees shared relatively progressive views on gender, masculinity, and even sexuality. Keeping in mind the mostly liberal backgrounds of my research participants, it is nonetheless notable to observe how white men who served under the powerfully indoctrinating SADF can and have successfully adapted their own social views post-apartheid. This was found to be true in every case, from veterans who served at various eras of the SADF. Questions probed issues of what it means to be a man, as well as who should get to serve in the military and how their military experience shaped their “manhood.” Derrick, the oldest of my interviewees at age 65, shares his view on manhood.

Derrick: Oh. Um. You know, there's this whole notion of what is a man.

I: Right.

Derrick: You know. And. And. And. Yeah, you've got to stand up.

I: Yeah.

Derrick: Be responsible, responsibility. You've got to make sure things happen. You're going to go to.. Yeah. Be caring, loving, and go on to have a partner or family if you have family.

When asked about the topic of women serving in the military, Derrick reveals more about his views on gender roles.

I: So do you think that women should be allowed, should be in that structure? I think there is a place for women in the military as well?

Derrick: Yeah, that's a good question. Mm. I mean, there are women in various armies around the world. They're active riflemen or mortars or tank drivers or whatever.

I: Yeah.

Derrick: But I wouldn't say it's, I would say it's not the right place for anyone.

I: Right. Yeah. Regardless of gender?

Derrick: Yeah, regardless of gender. But it's, you know, in our societies, you know, men are the breadwinners and protectors of the family or the home. And that, that is part of what you do and who you are.

Derrick does seem to prescribe to some ideas of gender roles, acknowledging that men should be more responsible and should “stand up.” He also recognizes the role of men as protectors and providers, and how that is a central component of what being a man is. However, he also holds ideas of manhood that are starkly different from what was propagated by the SADF. For him, being a man is about being loving and caring. Hegemonic masculinity upholds men as being responsible and protective, yes, but being loving and nurturing would be considered feminine, not masculine. Derrick has been able to separate himself from these conservative notions of masculinity to have a more holistic view of what a man should be. He also recognizes that gender does not play a role in who should be in the military; rather, anyone should be cautious about joining the military, regardless of their gender identity.

Some of my other interviewees shared even more progressive views of gender, departing immensely from any ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Wayne does not believe in any specific requirements to be a man, but rather focuses on what it means to be a good *human*.

I: What do you think of this idea that the military kind of makes someone a man? Do you believe that? You know? So to you, what, what would you say constitutes being a man to you? What does that mean to you?

Wayne: I think, I think being a whole person is, is more important to me than being either gender. I don't know.

He continues,

Wayne: Yeah. Yeah. I was very turned off by what they tried to present, as you know, what is manly, that is. Yeah.

I: So you, you're kind of aware that there was a kind of like indoctrination, you were aware of that before coming into the army.

Wayne: It was not at all disguised.

I: So kind of out in the open. Yeah. Interesting. Do you think that manhood is earned? Like, do you think you have to earn to become a man? What would you say with that?

Wayne: I think, I think to become a good person is something that, that is

that is earned. Um, but no, I don't think that you necessarily become a man or a woman.

Wayne's incredibly neutral view of gender is the exact opposite of the hegemonic masculinity ideology the SADF attempted to instill in its conscripts. Warren sees no tangible separation from what a man should be or what a woman should be, whereas hegemonic masculinity aligns either gender with specific qualities and expectations. Wayne is a prime example of how not all white male SADF veterans have held onto the social views of the environment they were immersed into. Winston, while having as progressive views as Wayne on gender roles, shares a vision of manhood also departed from hegemonic masculinity.

I: Just to go back to it, I have a few more questions, do you think that manhood has to be earned? And if so, how do you earn it?

Winston: Oh, that's quite an interesting question. And if it has to be earned, that means somebody is judging it, judging it, right. I don't really believe so, but believe that if you're respectful, if you have a healthy um, and respective, a healthy and balanced aspect to your character that could be defined as manhood. Yeah, character components. And I think one could reach that by having building and trying to employ parts of your character that, that allows your character to manifest in those particular things. So those qualities. Yes. And in there, I would probably put things like, you know, pretty close to what we talked about earlier, respect and appreciation for others. Yeah. You know, kindness and- and compassion. And I think those kind of all fit into that.

Winston's view mirrors Derrick's in that he too associates certain qualities with manhood, but the qualities he associates are not aligned with ideas of hegemonic masculinity. He also cites what would be considered more feminine qualities, such as kindness and compassion. Winston similarly shows how his view of manhood is more nuanced, and not entirely shaped by conservative social views. Finally, Stanley too shares views on gender that are remarkably progressive and insightful.

I: Do you think that manhood is earned, and what responsibilities do you think accompany being a man? So do you have to earn that title of being a man, do you think?

Stanley: You know, this just doesn't make sense to me. Because 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...

I: Yeah.

Stanley: Manhood to me has always been kind of a fake word.

I: Yeah.

Stanley: It's kind of a very tiny spectrum of humanity. Yeah, I think there's so much more to us.

Even Stanley, who once put forth an incredibly masculine and aggressive exterior as a younger man in and fresh out of the SADF, has developed his ideas on gender to be more focused on the individual's own humanity, rather than the importance of being a man or a woman. Not only has Stanley managed to create his own independent views of gender, but he also managed to embrace his own identity in the years since he served in the SADF. He tells me he is in the best part of his life, finally processing the trauma he went through and embracing sides of him he used to shut off.

Stanley: 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...

For years Stanley dealt with his trauma from the SADF through embracing masculinity and aggressiveness, by shutting out femininity in his identity and acting out with anger. Today, he is more feminine and himself than ever, finally shedding the shame the SADF tried so hard to inoculate inside of him. Stanley, along with the rest of my research participants, have come so far in reclaiming their identities independent from the military regime they were once forced to serve.

## Conclusion

Today, thousands of men who were conscripts under the SADF continue to live in South Africa, many of them doing their best to forget or close off their shared past. Their stories are understudied by the academic world, especially the stories of the lives they have led since they left the SADF. Yet, the experiences of these white male conscripts have a unique and important value in teaching us about the dangers of indoctrination, and the long-lasting trauma of forced military service. Gender and masculinity is a field in which these veterans have something especially valuable to offer. The hegemonic, militarized masculinity characteristic of the SADF was particularly salient, shaped by the Afrikaner-rooted socially conservative and religious ideology that dominated the governance of the National Party under apartheid. The SADF as an institution worked tirelessly to instill this hegemonic masculinity into its conscripts, rewarding men that displayed desirable hyper-masculine traits while abusing and ostracizing those that failed to meet their strict standards. This study sought to analyze how this hegemonic masculinity manifested itself in the military experiences of conscripts, simultaneously investigating how these conscripts were raised to consider the military in a violently militarized and authoritarian society. The Afrikaner-influenced ideology of manhood in the military was similarly explored, which took over ideals of English masculinity in white South African culture. Each of the four interviewees divulged how hegemonic masculinity impacted them to varying degrees, with the interviews taking note to highlight the stories and experiences of those they knew they suffered most from violating ideals of militarized masculinity. Finally, the participants were asked to share their own beliefs and ideas regarding manhood, including what a should be, how to earn manhood, and the role of men in the military.

The results of exploring the veteran's gendered attitudes found that all four had been largely successful in shaping a worldview of gender that is independent and in contrast with the hegemonic masculinity they were taught to embody. Though they were permanently impacted by what they saw and had to do, they also showed remarkable resilience; whether it be Stanley, who over years dealt with his trauma and reclaimed his identity as a confident gay man, or Derrick, who, despite great emotional distress, was able to honestly share with me a past he did not wish to remember. When asked about masculinity, few traces of hegemonic masculine ideals were present in their responses. Rather they cited kindness, compassion, or respect for others as key hallmarks of what a man should be, or did away with the idea of qualities for each gender altogether. Today these men live in a vastly different country, one with new values, government institutions, and policies that are a far reach from the apartheid state they were once forced to serve. If modern South Africa wishes to continue to heal from its scarred past, there must be room for narratives from every perspective possible. The white male conscripts of the SADF, while clearly not the primary victims of apartheid, were also victims of a system that sought to indoctrinate their minds through violent coercion and relentless social pressure. These men therefore have critical lessons to teach us: the dangers of hegemonic masculinity as an ideology, and how, even under the full force of a regime as powerful as the apartheid state, human beings can readjust themselves to a new society, and form their own opinions of how the world ought to be.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Topic 1- experience in military

1. How old are you if you don't mind my asking?
2. When and where did you serve in the armed forces?
3. What is your ethnic background?
4. Did you feel that Afrikaaner culture and values were particularly influential in the military?
5. Were you raised to believe joining the military was honorable and necessary? Was this belief instilled in you at home? At school? By whom?
6. How did your time in the armed forces influence you as a person? Did you feel your political or moral values change? Your personality or the way you behave in relationships?
7. Did you talk about these changes with anyone at that time, or since that time? Why/why not?
8. Was there a pressure to act a certain way during your time in the armed forces? How would you describe this?
9. Was the environment in the military competitive? Did you feel you had to prove yourself as better or stronger than other soldiers?
10. Did you observe any bullying or harassment between commanding officers and soldiers, or between soldiers themselves? Was behavior such as this accepted?  
\*share vignette about aversion project report
11. Did you witness or hear of any homosexual soldiers in particular being harassed? How was this perceived by other soldiers?
12. What determined the level of respect or admiration each individual commanding officer or soldier possessed? What kinds of behaviors, skills or values were rewarded in that environment?
13. Did anyone in your life comment on how you "changed" after you served? Did you feel they were right? In what way did you feel you had changed? Do you think such an observation would still be valid today – have those changes stayed with you ?

### Topic 2- social attitudes pertaining to masculinity

1. Many people say that serving in the military makes "a man" of someone. What do you think of this statement? What do you think constitutes "being a man"? Do you believe serving in the military did this for you? In what way?
2. Do you believe manhood is earned? How is it earned? What responsibilities do you feel accompany "being a man"?
3. Do you feel a man's gender identity or sexual orientation influences society's perception of him as a man? Do you believe this has any merit? Why do you think this?
4. How do you think the SA apartheid military environment impacted an individual's perception of what constitutes a man? Do you think this is an important goal of such environments? Why, or why not?

