

Reproducing or Creating a New Male? Bridal showers in the urban space in Botswana

Dr Rosinah Mmannana Gabaitse, (Lead author)¹, Mrs Senzokuhhe Setume², Prof. Musa Dube, Dr. Mmapula Lefa, Ms. Malebogo Kgalemang, Ms. Tshenolo Madigele, Dr. Tirelo Modie

Abstract

Each society has specific constructed images of acceptable maleness and femaleness and these constructions can happen within social groups which share a common identity and purpose. One such social group is formed within events such as bridal showers.³ This paper is based on findings of research recently conducted by women researchers from the University of Botswana⁴ who sought to explore how the African philosophy of *Botho or Ubuntu* is manifested through bridal showers in Gaborone, an urban space in Botswana.⁵ Although researching masculinities was not necessarily part of our main objective for carrying out the study, it was nevertheless one of the themes that emerged. Bridal showers are gendered spaces where masculinities; old, new and in competition are constructed, reproduced and questioned. This paper

¹ Dr Rosinah Gabaitse is a Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellow with the University of Bamberg in Germany. She is also a lecturer at the University of Botswana. rosegabaitse@yahoo.com

² Mrs Senzokuhle Setume, Prof. Musa Dube, Dr. Mmapula Lefa, Ms. Malebogo Kgalemang, Ms. Tshenolo Madigele and Dr. Tirelo Modie are all part of the University of Botswana as researchers and scholars. Musa Dube is also a research fellow at UNISA. This study on 'Botho/Ubuntu and Community Building in the Urban Space: An Exploration of Naomi, Laban, Baby and Bridal Showers in Botswana' was sponsored by the John-Templeton Foundation. This paper is based on the data collected from the bridal showers in Gaborone as part of the larger research.

³ A bridal shower is a pre-wedding party held in honour of a bride-to-be mainly to shower her with gifts before her wedding. Bridal showers have their roots in the Western world. Our findings reveal that bridal showers gained popularity in Botswana in the 1990's through American Television programs.

⁴ The research was sponsored by Nagel Institute in America. Apart from bridal showers, it also focused on baby showers, Naomi and Laban showers which we discuss in separate papers.

⁵ *Botho/Ubuntu* refers to "an African Philosophy that places emphasis on being human through other people" (Tutu 1999). *Ubuntu/Botho* embraces values of caring, generosity and sharing, respect and mutual existence. *Botho* is revered in Africa and to Botswana as an indigenous "text" and as a value system. *Botho/Ubuntu* has been expressed as "I in You and You in I", "I am because we are," "I exist because you exist".

therefore, seeks to establish if bridal showers reinforce or reproduce hegemonic masculinities or if they offer space to construct newer forms of masculinities. The analysis of the data is guided by feminist theories of power, and masculinity studies globally.

Introduction

Although bridal showers are not indigenous to Botswana, women in Botswana have embraced them as part of their subculture. While the main purpose of bridal showers might be to shower brides with gifts, they achieve more than that.⁶ They provide spaces for women to talk among themselves and forge friendships. For the purposes of this paper, bridal showers are explored as gendered spaces where masculinities, old, new and in competition are constructed, reproduced and questioned. Bridal showers demonstrate that women are actively engaged in shaping, co-producing, normalising and even fetishising masculinities (Talbot and Quayle 2010: 256). In this context, the existence of masculinities is relational to women's approval, encouragement, endorsement and performance. In all the showers we attended, women emphasised during *go laa*⁷ that understanding what a man is, was often defined by recognising his ego, sexual needs, and his role as the head of the household. Ironically, during these bridal showers, an event associated

⁶ Bridal showers have been used to raise funds to be used for necessities on the day of the wedding such as paying for the venue of the wedding and food.

⁷ *Go laa* is a Setswana word which means to give advice on good and acceptable behaviour. However, its meaning is deeper – it is a lifelong process of giving sets of rules that govern good behaviour in order to avoid bad and unacceptable behaviour. It is also a rite, a counselling process, a form of socialisation, where expectations and attitudes are communicated. It usually happens during some form of transition, children growing up, transitioning from childhood to teenage-hood, from singlehood to marriage, after the death of a loved one, when one enters university, when a child starts a new job among others. In the contexts of marriage and bridal showers, it is a cultural process, a ritual, a ceremony, where only married women intentionally come together in one place in the 10s and 20s, gather around the bride and give her advice on marriage. During *go laa*, no chairs are allowed; all women sit on the floor of a house veranda or a private room with outstretched legs, wearing traditional dresses with headscarves and shawls around their shoulders. The bride is dressed in traditional attire too and sits in the middle with her head bowed. She does not say anything except to nod her head occasionally when asked if she understands the advice given. Bridal showers have adopted *go laa*, but in a more relaxed manner. *Go laa* assumes different shapes depending on the bridal shower, however, it is never scripted and it is spontaneous as women stand up and talk freely to the bride about topics such as, how to treat her husband and in-laws, money and sex matters among others. In the context of this paper, *go laa* is critical for the construction of masculinities because it is through this process that patriarchal prerogatives and gender stereotypes are communicated to the bride. Unfortunately, since we did not want to interrupt the flow of the bridal showers, we never got to get the ages, educational qualifications of all the women who were engaged in this process. However, from the demographics, we know that the bridal shower attendees were mostly less than 40.

with women, a significant amount of time was spent discussing the needs and the role of men. In this way it became spaces where women were actively shaping, co-producing and co-creating some form of masculinity/ies. In this paper we argue that women are not just passive in the construction of masculinities. They actively reproduce, negotiate or construct masculinities in the bridal shower space in Gaborone. In this paper we explore the significance of these constructions and reconstructions. We further explore how these constructions have the potential to transform and influence the construction of less rigid masculinities which affirm all women, children, gay men and women.

Methodology

This paper is based on findings of a larger research project conducted by women researchers from the University of Botswana who sought to explore how the African philosophy of *Botho or Ubuntu* is manifested through bridal showers in the capital city of Gaborone. The study was conducted among women over a period of 15 months. Participants were selected by way of purposive availability sampling. We randomly selected individuals from a publicised list from the marriage registry at the District Commissioners office and churches and our participants constituted those who voluntarily allowed the research team to attend their bridal showers. Other participants invited us to attend their showers after we made announcements on Facebook and radio about our research intentions.

We attended eighteen showers in total. Whenever we attended a shower, someone in the research team introduced the study objectives, research ethics and methods at length. The women asked questions for clarity, after which they gave us their written consent to observe the bridal showers, as well as to audio and video record the conversations and make field notes. Through these methods, observing and recording *go laa* proved to be a significant source of data. Since issues of confidentiality and anonymity are critical in research, we assured the respondents that we would quote them verbatim in our analysis but would not disclose their real identities. We also made use of self-administered questionnaires and we got back 177 out of a total of approximately two hundred. A hundred women who attended the showers as well as all the eighteen brides volunteered for one to one in-depth interviews. 90.4% of the women who participated in our study fall within the 20-40 age bracket while 9.6% fall within the 41-45 age group. This indicates that the bridal showers were attended by relatively young women according to Botswana standards. The women's educational

qualifications ranged from Form five certificates to PhD, with a lot of women holding Degree certificates.⁸ We used both Setswana (the local language) and English during our research as participants used English to Setswana interchangeably, as it is common in Botswana for people to mix these two languages in their conversations.

The audio recorded data was transcribed as accurately as possible, pausing where the respondents paused and leaving some sentences incomplete as they left them. We tried as much as possible to capture the laughs, the giggles and the hesitancy in answering questions. We recognise these as forms of communication which form part of a bigger narrative about womanhood and manhood in Botswana. We used verbatim quotations from our participants interspersed throughout the paper and these are shown in italics. The numbers in brackets at the end of each indicate the shower number. If the quotations have a mix of both English and Setswana, and the Setswana bits are short, we interpret those parts within the quotations. If the quotations in Setswana are longer, we provide a full translation in English in the footnotes.

The bridal shower

Before we discuss our findings, we want to provide a brief overview of what we found, during our research, would generally happen at a 'typical' bridal shower. A month or two before the day of the bridal shower, the chief organiser contacts close friends and relatives of the bride who form an organising committee. With almost all the showers, the organisers used social media especially *WhatsApp* to communicate among themselves. This communication worked in addition to invitations sent to guests, stating the date, venue and time of the bridal shower with the 'gate pass'. The 'gate pass' is something that all guests are expected to bring for them to be admitted into the bridal shower venue, typically in the form of a small gift such as a litre of juice, a dish cloth or liquid soap. The organisers agree on the amount of money they have to contribute towards the bride's gifts and the catering for the event. We observed that the organisers' monetary contribution, the type of gifts the bride receives, and the number of guests invited was guided by the bride's wish list, status, and her network of friends and relatives. This influenced the number of attendees which differed in each context.

On the day of the bridal shower, women arrive at different times to a well decorated venue with food and drinks prepared by the organisers

⁸ One attains a Form five certificate after 7 years of primary schooling and 5 years of secondary schooling.

beforehand. The women socialise in small groups, before the director of ceremony takes over and informs them of the programme of the day. Generally the programme of the day involves an opening prayer, introductions of each participant and their relationship to the bride, as well as games such as, 'what is under my skirt' and 'how well do you know the bride.' When the women are settled, the important business of the day begins; namely the *go laa* (as described above) and the presentation of the gifts to the bride. During the *go laa* the attendees who are single, married or divorced are given an opportunity to stand up and give advice to the bride. Each woman is free to give advice on any theme/topic such as money, intimacy, how to treat in-laws, and entertainment to name a few. There is no time limitation and women speak for as long as they are comfortable, with occasional interjections from other women. This process is taken seriously and is never rushed. In some showers, the organisers invite married women who have close connection with the bride to *go laa* the bride before all invited guests do so. In all the showers, the keynote speakers were married women in their 40's. When the *go laa* is complete, the bride is presented with her gifts after which the women eat together, engage in conversation or dance until late.

Gender: Masculinities and Femininities

Masculinities and femininities are central aspects of gender performance and how they function must be understood within the gender spectrum.⁹ Within this spectrum, gender is understood as "a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people actions."¹⁰ In addition, gender refers to the assigning of roles, attitudes, traits, and behaviours that emphasise differences between males and females.¹¹ Scholars of gender studies argue that women and men are born, but females and males are created and constructed through social interactions. Awareness of the social constructedness of gender assists in understanding that;

femininity and masculinity, the terms that denote one's gender, refer to a complex set of characteristics and behaviours that are prescribed for

⁹ Talbot, K. and Quayle, M. 'The Perils of being a Nice Guy: Contextual Variation in Five Young Women's Constructions of Acceptable Hegemonic Masculinities.' *Men and Masculinities*, 13 no. 2 (2010):255-278.

¹⁰ Gerson, J.M. and Peiss, K. 'Boundaries, negotiation, consciousness: Reconceptualizing gender relations', *Social Problems*, 32 no.4 (1985): 327

¹¹ Hughs, M & Paxton, P. *Women, Politics and Power: A Global Perspective*, (London: Sage Publications 2014), 24.

a particular sex by a society and learned through the socialization process¹²

Thus, through the socialisation process, boys and men are conditioned to be masculine and girls and women are conditioned to be feminine. Boys and men learn acceptable ways of being masculine through proverbs, music, imitation and role playing.¹³ The community, family, media, friends and government systems are all involved in teaching boys to be masculine and girls to be feminine. These institutions constantly weave norms of behaviour, attitudes, expectations and culture typical of, and ascribed to, concepts of male and female within a society.¹⁴ This process never stops, continuing even when men reach an age when they are considered adults, as masculinities evolve and are influenced by social groups – such as bridal showers – that are constantly constructing images of an ideal male.

Raewyn Connell identifies four types of masculinities namely; hegemonic, subordinate, marginalised and complicit.¹⁵ Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant, idealised, culturally privileged and socially accepted performance of masculinity. It is often manifested through the domination of women, children, and other men who perform other masculinities.¹⁶ The framework of hegemonic masculinity elevates males to a status higher than that of females. Males are privileged as leaders, and are constructed as strong, powerful and devoid of emotions. In addition males wanting to conform to hegemonic ideals are required to distance themselves from characteristics which are considered feminine, by displaying aggression, risk taking and high sexual energy.¹⁷ In this article we examine how bridal showers become spaces which perpetuate as well as challenge the concept of hegemonic masculinities.

Masculinities and Bridal showers in Gaborone

There are three main types of masculinities that emerge from bridal showers in Gaborone. In one bridal shower, however, some women affirmed one or two forms of masculinities which appeared to be

¹² Peterson, V.S and Runyan, A. *Global Gender Issues* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1993) 17

¹³ Dube, M. 'Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Understanding and Acting on the issues,' in Dube, M.W (ed) *HIV/AIDS and the curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003): 84-100.

¹⁴ Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Connell, *Masculinities*

¹⁶ Connell, R.W. & Messerschmidt, J.W. 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept.' *Gender and Society*, 19.6 (2005), 829-859.

¹⁷ Fausto-Sterling, A. *Sexing the Body: Gender politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. (New York, NY: Basic books).

contradictory. In the following section we discuss the different forms of masculinities emerging from bridal shower narratives.

Conformity to hegemonic masculinity

Some women conform to and reproduce Botswana hegemonic masculinities as the idealised form of masculinity.¹⁸ Here heterosexual males are elevated and celebrated as heads of households and in charge of the economic and spiritual success of the home. This group of women endorse hegemonic masculinity as *normal*, because it is *our tradition and the way we have been doing things* (9). Women who challenged hegemonic masculinity were accused of being *modernised* and betraying Setswana cultural norms where *mosadi*¹⁹ *remains under the authority of the man* (5). Hegemonic masculinities are reproduced in two main ways during bridal showers. First, the bride is instructed in the art of submission towards her husband and second, the bride is domesticated through the gifting process. We will discuss these in greater detail below.

Reproducing hegemonic masculinity through submission

One of the recurring themes within the bridal showers is that the bride must submit to her husband's *leadership and vision* because he is the *head of the household* and the wife is *molala* (the neck).

He is the head – he comes with the vision, your job is to pray and support him. Sometimes you should be silent. Be careful when and how to speak...Career; even if you succeed, don't ever think you cease to be submissive to him. He remains the head and father of the house. Don't ever think you are equal. He is not your business associate (Keynote speaker, 4).

¹⁸ Most of the women who attended bridal showers were young, educated and financially independent. We had expected more latitude with questioning hegemonic masculinities, but they still spoke of the man as a provider as if women's salaries were not useful in the household. It is possible that they were performing a public transcript because of the presence of the researchers. However, because of the carefree natures of bridal showers, this is unlikely. If the women could talk about their sexual encounters, their experiences of drinking too much and not remembering what they did the night before in our presence, then it is unlikely that they had difficulty discussing their beliefs about masculinities.

¹⁹ *Mosadi* means female, woman or wife.

Tiro ya mosadi is to help- ke molala hubby ke tlhogo...but finances are controlled by wife; women must be in charge of her sexuality. A man comes with a vision and a woman implements it (5).²⁰

The above quotations appear to endorse husbands as visionaries in the home, and the role of the wife as the *helper*, or *molala* (neck), is to honour the husband's leadership through submission, silence and prayer. The bride is cautioned that a well-paying job does not make her equal to her husband because the husband is not a *business associate* but, the head of the household. If she has to speak, she must be careful of *when and how to speak* because silence is a marker of submission. The bride's mode of operation in affirming hegemonic masculinity is silence. She has to be silent even if she is not clear of her husband's whereabouts, and should submit to him sexually even if *she has a headache*.

Gape monna ga a bodiwe gore o tswa kae monna, o tshwanetse gore ere ha a batla...waitse gore ke bua ka eng akere, o seka wa re tlhogo e opa jaaka mme a ne a bua, mo neele di tsa gagwe ka nako tsotlhe (5).²¹

James Amanze, writing within the context of Botswana states that, "if a wife asks the husband where he has been, it is a sign of disrespect"²² and some women endorse this characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. The silent and submissive wife, the husband as the head of the household, the husband whose whereabouts cannot be questioned, and a husband's high sexual libido – all markers of hegemonic masculinity in Botswana – are affirmed and reproduced by women in bridal showers within urban spaces.

²⁰ (Translation): "The job of- the wife is to help, she is the neck and the husband is the head... but finances are controlled by wife; women must be in charge of her sexuality. A man comes with a vision and a woman implements it."

This extract demonstrates the inconsistency between belief and practice. The respondent believes that the husband is the *head of the household*, suggesting that he should be in charge of the finances and his wife's sexuality, yet in the same sentence, she says that the wife has control over the family *finances* and owns *her sexuality*. Control of wealth and female sexuality by husbands is important in maintaining hegemonic masculinity. If the wife has power to control these, the headship of a man is useless. Whether this plays out in marriages exactly as it is said in bridal showers needs another paper and research. But it may demonstrate that although hegemonic masculinity requires male dominance and female submission, women are not as powerless within relationships. This ambiguity and contradiction is a demonstration of cognitive dissonance at its best.

²¹ A husband's whereabouts should not be questioned...but when he comes home you give him sex, you do know what I mean right? Don't say you have a headache; give him sex when he wants.

²² Amanze, J. *African Traditional Religions and Culture in Botswana: A comprehensive Textbook* (Gaborone: Pula Press 2002) 184

Reproducing hegemonic masculinity through the domestication of the bride.

The second way in which hegemonic masculinity is reproduced in bridal shower settings is through the gifting process which entrenches female domesticity. The brides' gifts usually consist of household items such as pots, plates, microwaves and sheets. In the Botswana context, the home is the domain of women and, towards this end, the girl child is socialised from a very young age to emulate her mother with regards to performing domestic chores such as cleaning the house and sweeping the yard.²³ Bridal showers solidify and confirm the brides understanding of her domestic responsibilities through the gifts the bride receives, and thus the house is thoroughly feminised.²⁴ This entrenches female domesticity in as much as it safeguards hegemonic masculinity which thrives on demarcating spaces for men and women.

Put your house in order since you are the chief of the house²⁵... Let your house be clean at all times, be patient with your husband, even when he's messing up the house, make sure it's always clean... take care of your husband's dressing, making sure that his clothes are neat and ironed... be in charge of the cooking and cleaning of the house (3).²⁶

Whether the domestic role of the wife is exaggerated and does not mirror reality is not of much concern at this moment. What is critical is what the exaggeration perpetuates; the absent groom and the bride are taught to draw boundaries of what is feminine and to respect boundaries that emphasise the masculine so that hegemonic masculinity is preserved.²⁷ Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is entrenched by women's narratives

²³ Dube, 'Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS

²⁴ Williams, C.L., *Still A man's world: Men who do women's work*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁵ Being the *chief of the house* in its own way explodes the very rhetoric of hegemonic masculinity, where women are perceived as powerless.

²⁶ One of the recurring themes in the bridal showers is how the wife needs to take care not only of the house, but the husband as well, *get Vaseline and apply it to his lips, upgrade his hygienic status, buy him new stuff, pick his clothes when they are lying on the floor* etc. This is ironic; it seems the husband/male is disorganised and chaotic. He is not so much in control and the wife should take control of his life. He is supposed to be the *head of the household, coming up with a vision* yet he cannot take care of himself, cannot dress himself, he is chaotic and messy. How is he then the head of a woman? Isn't a hegemonic male supposed to preserve his own status? Does this chaotic man deserve the high status that the women give him?

²⁷ These are the women who have professions; and it can be exhausting and unrealistic for women to do the household chores on a daily basis after a full day's work. Yet, it seems this is a reality for some women in this community.

within bridal showers in Gaborone in two ways; first, by endorsing a wife's submission to her husband, and second, by entrenching female domesticity within the marital home.

Subversive masculinities

The second set of women's narratives within the bridal shower setting can be said to endorse subversive masculinities that challenge gendered social hierarchies perpetuated through hegemonic masculinities. The masculinities produced here emphasise mutuality and egalitarian existence between husbands and wives. The following verbatim quotations capture these constructions. We use several of them in order to allow the women to 'speak' for themselves as well as to capture their depth and intensity.

- a. *Yes at times the bride is advised to demand that the husband must share roles (6).*
- b. *In village they advise that monna ke selepe – this is not said in urban setting – where people do not believe this (4, see also 5, 6, 8, 9).²⁸*
- c. *Times have changed – house chores are now 50/50 for men and women-demand to share household chores (4).*
- d. *Women are empowered. Be the women you want to be; women now can work and can have same status as men (5).*
- e. *We say you are going to work on the 9 to 5 pm job, you need to ask your man gore o tswa kae, (where he comes from) we do not see a relationship unlike bogologolo (in the olden times) where you kept quiet, also as the breadwinner of the family you need to know gore o tswa kae (where he comes from) and everything. We also advise the bride that husband should assist with the children, you need a time off as wife...so we definitely do change the roles here and there, help the wife with the kids, clean the dishes, o feele (because) lotlhe le tswa ko tirong, (husband and wife sweeps the floor), you are both tired, you must take turns in doing the household chores (4).*
- f. *Men in towns are held accountable by their women; women expect their men to participate in households chores; they carry babies around. Look around and see how men take babies to clinics etc (5).*

²⁸ (Translation): In the village they advise that a man is an axe- this is not said in an urban setting-where people do not believe this).

- g. *...work together as a team and contribute towards the upbringing of a healthy and happy family... you have to be transparent to each other; you should know the salary of your partner and know the expenses (3).*

We can draw several conclusions about the kind of masculinity emphasised in this group. First, the demand is on husbands to cross gender boundaries and participate in, what is generally characterised as, feminine roles of cleaning the house and taking care of the children. Second, this kind of masculinity demands fidelity and accountability from husbands. Men are expected to be faithful to their wives in order to preserve their health and minimise chances of contracting HIV. Language that encourages husbands to have multiple partners in order to prove their manhood is rejected.²⁹ During one of the off camera conversations some women articulated the importance of language in shaping masculinities. One of them argued that, women create dogs out of their husbands by consistently naming them *dogs, axes and gourds*.³⁰ She said that men behave like dogs because they know that is what is expected from them anyway. She concluded the conversation by saying, *“my husband is not a dog.”* Third, the proposed masculinity demands transparency between wives and husbands. Hence this masculinity thrives on mutuality and equal existence between spouses towards building a healthy and happy home. Fourth, this masculinity affirms female libido and sexual desire. The following extracts are profound in celebrating female sexuality.

- a. *There is fun in marriage, sex is important for both and styles of doing sex are many. I don't think these things are said in the village (5).*
- b. *Just to add on what she said: it's okay to ask for sex whenever you want it as much as your husband may ask for it. Also avoid going to bed with your clothes on. (Keynote speaker 3).*
- c. *Taking a bath with your husband is very good because you can continue the fun all the way from the bathroom to the bedroom (3).*

²⁹ These women reject sayings such as *monna ke selepe*, (a man is an axe) which means, like an axe that cuts many trees, a man can be shared sexually by many women. These women deconstruct male promiscuity by rejecting language that normalises male promiscuity.

³⁰ There are sayings making the rounds in Botswana, such as *monna ke ntsa* (a man is a dog), *monna ke phafana* (a man is a gourd). These sayings normalise male promiscuity (Gabaitse 2012, Dube 2003, Mookodi 2000).

The bride is encouraged to seduce her husband, to give and demand sexual pleasure because she is a sexual being. Not only is the recognition of female libido subversive, women discussing sexual desire in Botswana in a public gathering crosses boundaries of traditional hegemonic masculinities because “sex talk is masculinised.”³¹ Yet, this kind of masculinity un-ambiguously acknowledges that women are sexual beings and should participate together with their husbands in creating a conducive atmosphere for the enjoyment of sex. Lastly, this new masculinity encourages a new male who is in touch with his emotions, who is available and present for and to his wife – *men must be friends and mates to the wife* (7). Friendship demands companionship, intimacy, dependability and care and this encourages egalitarian existence.

Fractured and complicit masculinities

The third type of masculinity that emerges from the bridal shower context in Gaborone demonstrates that masculinities are fractured, forever shifting and full of ambiguities. The new kind of male constructed by the women’s narratives seems to straddle hegemonic masculinity, on one hand, a kind of counter hegemonic masculinity, on the other. This type of masculinity Connell refers to as complicit masculinity. Complicit masculinity is a form of masculinity;

in which a man does not fit into all the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, but does not intentionally challenge hegemonic masculinity because they look the part of fitting into hegemonic masculinity.³²

Such men “enjoy and reap the hegemonic masculinities’ dividends”³³ and so, they are not bothered by actively and overtly challenging it, although they do not subscribe to most of its characteristics. The ambiguities and ambivalence of this form of masculinity is evident within the narratives of the women. Our data is littered with numerous ambiguous articulations of this masculinity;

- a. *Don't be a silent woman, I think gape that's why I love gore bridal showers... there's a bit of feminism ...the peaceful feminism... there's nothing wrong with your husband hiding*

³¹ Montemurro, B, Bartasavich J, Wintermute, L (eds), ‘Lets Not Talk about Sex: The Gender of Sexual discourse.’ *Sexuality and Culture*, 19.1, (2015), 139

³² Connell, *Masculinities*. 79, 82.

³³ Connell, *Masculinities*, 116

*money from you, but you as a wife you don't need to attack him, you can humble yourself... you are not against him (4).*³⁴

- b. *Be a man, but not that kind of a man, be a modern man. Being a modern man doesn't mean you are weak, it means you know you are not mo lenyalong ole one (alone in marriage), there is nothing wrong with the wife being dominant, a provider in the house, but as a woman, ole ko bridal shower (at the bridal shower) you know there is an aspect of pride, an ego and everything else mo monneng (in a man). You are giving him that pride and respect le ha ele wena o tshwereng the title ya the provider in the house (Allow him to be a proud man, respect his ego even if you are the provider in the home) (4).*
- c. *At showers women encourage each other not to be docile; there is a bit of feminism- Bridal showers give the bride insight on how to do things – peaceful feminism. They conscientise each other of the men's ego (5).*
- d. *A woman is submissive and a man is the leader of the house. But in the bridal showers, ladies advise the bride that she has the power; to take care of her husband, meeting his basic needs.....I think so because with traditional go laa it says "Tsoga o feele jarata" (wake up and sweep the yard), whereas with showers it's; "Tsoga o lebege" (wake up and smarten yourself). So there is an element of taking care of yourself as a woman but yet being submissive to your husband (5).*

From the surface, these extracts seem subversive; the wife speaks, she is in control, she is assertive in demanding right treatment from the husband; she is not silenced and she is not docile. The bride is advised to be assertive while the demand is on the husband to be a *modern man*. The *modern man* is the one who acknowledges that marriage is *partnership*. He understands that *there is nothing wrong with the wife being dominant and a provider in the house*. This *modern man* engages in domestic duties such as *cleaning the dishes, feeding children, cooking*, yet these should not be expected from them because *men do it out of love and not expectation* (5). When asked if she would be comfortable finding her married brother washing the dishes, a young married woman in her late 20's with a University degree responded;

³⁴ Do not be silent as women, bridal showers encourage a bit of peaceful feminism, an encouraging sort of feminism, the kind that does not encourage women to be against men even when the husbands hide the money from the wife, the wife will not attack the husband, but the wife humbles herself as she asks the husband about it, so that the husband does not feel attacked.

I'd feel okay; yes... [the yes is prolonged, she giggles and laughs here] especially because I'm the only girl ko lapeng (in my parents' house) so my brothers grew up helping me with the dishes.(4)

Another woman of the same age from another shower said;

Husbands cook as well ... but when the mother is around he doesn't do this (giggles) (5).

Herein lie the contradictions; the wife can assert herself, however, this subversiveness is contradicted when, in the same breath, within the same conversation, the bride has to engage in *peaceful feminism*, where she must constantly be mindful of the *male's ego* and *pride*. By advising young women to be conscious of the male ego while encouraging them to appear demure, are ways in which the tenets of hegemonic masculinity are upheld. It seems, also, that husbands participate in domestic roles, yet do not do so in the presence of their mothers. The giggles from our respondents communicate discomfort, highlighting the tensions surrounding the performance of this kind of masculinity because it is under surveillance from family members and the wives themselves. While some women desire the performance of this egalitarian masculinity, they, as the narrators of these masculinities, seem to discourage its performance in the presence of family members in order to maintain their husbands' status as 'real' men. The men are happy to pretend to subscribe to hegemonic masculinity by avoiding 'feminine' roles when their mothers are around.

Discussion of findings

Bridal showers reinforce hegemonic masculinities as much as they construct and nurture other forms of counter hegemonic masculinity. However, the narratives underlining subversive and fractured/complicit masculinities (which are less rigid) still operate within a hegemonic masculinity framework by failing to unreservedly denounce it. The subversive masculinity narratives do appear to dismiss most characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. In these narratives the new man is constructed ideally as one who values equality, mutuality, co-existence and faithfulness within marriage. However, the construction of this masculinity is negotiated within the paradigm of hegemonic masculinities. While there is a demand for partnership and equal sharing of roles, the gifts from the women who produced this masculinity did not reflect that. Instead of presenting the bride with a mix of kitchen and farm equipments such as wheel barrows and shovels to change the narrative of domesticity communicated by the gifting process within bridal showers, these women did not do that. In addition, while the bride was

advised to be proactive on issues of romance and seduction, it is so that the husband will not have extra marital affairs. In this way, the women reproduce narratives inferring that a man's high sex drive must be contained by his wife and not by him. In this way a man's infidelity becomes linked to his wife's inadequacy or the responsibility of the other woman. This pits women against each other as enemies out to seduce each other's husbands and normalises male infidelity because men are perceived as helpless victims of their own actions.

The third set of narratives show how hegemonic masculinity can be reproduced through ambivalent attitudes. Men and women are required to denounce hegemonic masculinity yet they still subscribe to and honour it. Clearly the women destabilise most of the brutal characteristics of hegemonic masculinity such as male infidelity and violence against women. However, pressure to conform to dominant norms of traditional Botswana masculinity renders the performance of this masculinity challenging. The construction of the *modern man* within this group of women demonstrates that masculinities are ever changing and men can subscribe to different forms of masculinities at the same time.

In conclusion, bridal showers destabilise the performance of hegemonic masculinities. Although they have not produced a clear and unambiguous new masculinity which is free from traces of hegemonic masculinity, the subversiveness of the second and third narratives constructing newer masculinities should be celebrated. Bridal showers offer a space for conversations to nurture these subordinate masculinities going forward. The conversations demonstrate that a change in social norms, mind sets, language and more needs to take place for these masculinities to be entrenched in schools, churches and society as a whole. Bridal showers have the potential to transform and influence the construction of less rigid masculinities where violence against women and children, male infidelity and homophobia are not tolerated. The construction of these masculinities goes a long way towards influencing the construction of maleness within religious communities which, at the moment focuses, on the male supremacy instead of the equality between men and women. This could form part of the religious groups' pre-marital counselling in the future. This is already evident in very small ways within bridal showers as the Bible is used to instruct young women to know that God desires partnership in marriage by using texts such as Gen 3. Contrary to the popular reading that blames Eve for causing Adam to sin, the keynote speaker in bridal shower 4, states that the text can be used to demonstrate that Adam and Eve were partners who influenced each other in eating the forbidden

fruit. The texts can teach modern families that women and men can listen to each other and exist as partners. In addition, we have already presented some of the data to churches and government in an effort to transform policies and mindsets about unhealthy masculinities and as a way of sharing our findings with communities outside the academy.

References

- Connel, Raewyn.W. & Messerschmidt, James.W. 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept.' *Gender and Society*, 19.6 (2005), 829-859.
- Connell, Raewyn. W. *Masculinities*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).
- Connell, Raewyn. W. 'Masculinities, change and conflict in global society: Thinking about the future of men's studies.' *Journal of Men's Studies*, 11.3, (2003), 249-266
- Dube, Musa. 'Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Understanding and Acting on the issues,' in Dube, M.W (ed) *HIV/AIDS and the curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003); 84-100.
- Gabaitse, Rosinah. 'Passion Killings in Botswana: Masculinity at Crossroads' in Chitando, E. & Chirongoma, S. (eds) *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*. (Geneva: WCC Publications 2012);305-312.
- Gerson, Judith.M. and Peiss, Kathy. 'Boundaries, negotiation, consciousness: Reconceptualizing gender relations', *Social Problems*, 32.4 (1985): 317–331.
- Hughes, Melanie & Paxton, Pamela. *Women, Politics and Power: A Global Perspective*, (London: Sage Publications 2014).
- Mookodi, Godisang. 'Male violence Against Women in Botswana: Discussion of Gender Uncertainties in a Rapidly Changing Environment.' *African Sociological Review* 8; 1 (2004);118-138.
- Montemurro, Beth, Bartasavich Jennifer, Wintermute, Leann (eds), 'Lets Not Talk about Sex: The Gender of Sexual discourse.' *Sexuality*

and Culture, 19.1, (2015);139-156
Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Sexing the Body: Gender politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. (New York, NY: Basic books, 2010).

Talbot, K. & Quayle, M. "The Perils of being a Nice Guy: Contextual Variation in Five Young Women's Constructions of Acceptable Hegemonic Masculinities." *Men and Masculinities*, 13.2 (2010), 255-278.

Tutu, Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness* (Doubleday: New York, 1999).

Williams, Christine L., *Still A man's world: Men who do women's work*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).