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Men's Issues, Men's Solutions: the Effects of a South African Mythopoetic Men's  
Group's Activities on Gender Equality: 2004-2005

Stuart Leon Rothgiesser / RTHSTU002

A minor dissertation submitted in *partial fulfillment* of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2011

**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
GRADUATE SCHOOL IN HUMANITIES

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MASTER IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

I, Stuart Leon Rothgiesser

of Suite 9, Highways, Derwent Street,  
Tamboerskloof, Cape Town 8001 South Africa

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CANDIDATE'S SIGNATURE

February 11, 2011

DATE

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: Men's Issues, Men's Solutions: the Effects of a South African Mythopoetic Men's Group's Activities on Gender Equality: 2004-2005

Dissertation Submitted by: Stuart Leon Rothgiesser, BA (Honours), Higher Diploma of Education, 2011

Dissertation supervised by:       Dr A D Spiegel  
Associate Professor  
Department of Social Anthropology  
University of Cape Town  
*and*  
Dr Robert Morrell  
Research Office  
University of Cape Town

Mythopoetic organisations are popular among largely middle-class (elite) men in well-resourced countries. These organisations have sprung up in the last twenty years to create a space where men come together to address issues of masculinity. Many profeminist writers have questioned the capacity of mythopoetic men's groups to promote gender equality. They see them as more likely to provide support for, rather than undermine, patriarchy. On the other hand, some scholars have pointed out that the complex process by which masculinity is constructed might provide opportunities for men to become more reflective and better able to accommodate the needs of a more equitable social order. Mythopoetic

men's work has, therefore, from the start been of interest - and controversial - to gender scholars and particularly to those who work for gender equality.

This thesis is based on my observations of some of the main approaches and activities of the largest mythopoetic men's group in South Africa, the ManKind Project-South Africa™ (MKP-SA), drawing on my status as an insider-outsider as a member of the group since 2003. It is based on research conducted over a four month period in 2005. The research employed a number of data-gathering methods including participant-observation (over twenty hours' worth in the group's formal leadership and peer support group settings and in its informal social activities), surveying (19 or 6.8% of the then membership returned questionnaires), informal conversations (numerous on the side of organisational activities), formal interviewing (eleven interviews), email list-serve monitoring over a two-month period and an extensive review of organisational literature.

The thesis analyses the reported effects of MKP-SA's activities on the men who participated in them. It focuses on several aspects of inter-personal and social relations regarded in gender studies as key determinants of gender equality: the men's ability to express their feelings, their engagement with fatherhood / father-son relations, their relationships with others and their willingness to engage in pro-feminist work.

My findings show that the MKP-SA, in its approach and in some of its activities, contributes to a dominant understanding of men in society which theorists characterize as hegemonic masculinity e.g. supporting hierarchy over equality, individualism over the group, dominance and aggression over subservience and peace and risk taking over safety. But there are also indications that some of the MKP-SA's activities contribute to processes of masculine reconstruction e.g. not supporting homophobia, supporting fatherhood and being emotionally open and responsible. I also found that while the activities and approach of MKP-SA had little effect on relations between men of different classes and races, or on elite men's willingness to become involved in pro-feminist work, they had very positive reported effects on gay men's abilities to define their masculinity and become comfortable with these definitions.

On the basis of my research I argue that there needs to be room for a more nuanced view of mythopoetic men's groups that allows for MKP-SA's (and other mythopoetic men's groups') activities to be understood as having ambiguous outcomes which may include promoting certain aspects of gender equality among elite men.

## *Dedication and Acknowledgements*

This paper is dedicated to men all over the world, who, like those in this study, are questioning who they are, how their gender identity is constructed and how they can better their worlds - and in particular the men of the mythopoetic movement, who at times must endure scorn and ridicule to continue this questioning. I believe that your doing this questioning make the world a safer place for me.

Like any project of a significant nature, many people helped with the completion of this paper. First and foremost, I would like to thank the 2004, 2005 and 2010 leadership bodies (“Councils”) of the ManKind Project-South Africa (MKP-SA), and in particular the respective Centre Directors Andries Du Toit, Emile Rorke and Andrew Fulton, as well as Gayo Primic, for permission and support to conduct research on the organization’s activities, including filling my many requests for information efficiently. I hope that the findings of this dissertation will be of use to the organization, and that I have described the MKP-SA’s membership and activities in an accurate manner that does justice to the good work of the organization.

I would also like to thank the eleven men who agreed to be formally interviewed for their courage and time, as well as the nineteen men who painstakingly returned questionnaires. Without your personal input, this dissertation would not have the texture and flavour. Similarly, I would like to thank the men of Embizweni, an NGO in Khayelitsha committed to helping men and run by MKP-SA members, for allowing me to sit in on their meeting – this gave me much insight into issues of race within the MKP-SA.

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MKP-SA men who spoke informally to me about my research in various venues, offering their opinions freely, as well as those who knew about my work and offered encouragement along the way.

Dr. Edward Read Barton is in the Department of Family and Child Ecology, Michigan State University, East Lansing and heads up the Changing Men's Collection located in that institution. He is also head of ManKind Project-International's Research arm and a noted scholar on mythopoetic men's groups (see my References) in his own right. He had been a great help in drawing up the questionnaire, providing reading material, negotiating permissions with the organization and providing encouragement from the very beginning of this study. Thank you, Ed.

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University of Cape Town

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Men the world over – still a minority, but a noticeable number, especially in the middle classes - are creating spaces to re-invent, re-work and re-find themselves, their relations, their concepts of masculinity/ies and their societies in men's groups. These groups, whether consciousness-raising groups, mythopoetic retreat trainings or pro-feminist marches, provide fertile grounds for testing how dominant discourses of masculinity, race and sexuality are reproduced or changed.

This thesis focuses on one men's group, the ManKind Project-South Africa (MKP-SA)<sup>TM</sup>, which was established in 2000 in Cape Town and defines itself as a "world class men's training and education organization"<sup>1</sup>. The organisation has numerous well defined leadership bodies of its own, closely modelled after those of its originator, the ManKind Project-International<sup>TM</sup><sup>2</sup> ("ManKind Project" or "MKP-I"). The ManKind Project was started in 1984 by author and therapist Bill Kauth, former Marine Corps officer Rich Tosi and university lecturer (PhD in Curriculum Studies) Ron Hering in Wisconsin, who created an experiential training called the New Warrior Training (now known as the New Warrior Training Adventure, described in more detail below). As its popularity grew, they formed an organisation called the New Warrior Network, which later became the ManKind Project.<sup>3</sup> Besides the main leadership body (called "the Council"), there is also an Elders' Council (for older members mostly over 50 years of age), an I-Group Council, a Multicultural and Diversity Training Council, a Leadership Council and a Lodge Keepers' Society (to take care of its 'Native American sweat lodge'<sup>4</sup>). In Chapter Two below, I provide more detail on the organisation and the reasons for making it the focus of my study. In this work I have considered MKP-SA as a part of the global mythopoetic men's movement.

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<sup>1</sup> ManKind Project South Africa. Online. Internet/ [www.mkp.org.za](http://www.mkp.org.za). Accessed February 09, 2011

<sup>2</sup> All terminology used with kind permission of ManKind Project International and ManKind Project-South Africa.

<sup>3</sup> ManKind Project International. Online. Internet/ [www.mankindproject.org](http://www.mankindproject.org) Accessed February 08, 2011

<sup>4</sup> A sweat lodge is a hut in which people sit and pour water over hot stones to literally "sweat", sing, pray and follow guided meditations.

## **Finding the Wild Man – What is the Mythopoetic Movement?**

The mythopoetic men's movement saw its nascence in the early nineties, when American authors including Robert Bly (1990), Sam Keen (1992) and Bill Kauth (1992) published on what they described as a "crisis in masculinity". Bly, in particular, is seen as the father of the movement. As Michael Kimmel (1995, 4), the leading scholar of masculinity in the United States put it, "The mythopoetic men's movement, inspired and led by poet Robert Bly and his followers, seized the public imagination with the publication of Bly's best-selling book, *Iron John*, in 1990". Bly identified a crisis of masculinity among American men which he partly put down to the absence (emotional and physical) of fathers. Men, according to Bly, were lost and needed help to (re)find themselves. Numerous men's organisations grew up in the wake of the publication of Bly's book (which sold over a million copies) and embraced a therapeutic approach to men's pain (which is what was identified as the major symptom of the problem). In order to address this pain, men were encouraged to embrace their inner world, primarily through a variety of rituals (including chanting, drumming, getting close to nature, bonding with other men and expressing emotion). These groups became known as mythopoetic men's groups.

Bly's inspiration was the Grimm fairy tale - hence the description of the movement as 'mythopoetic' - of a man guided through eight stages of male growth by his mentor, a 'Wild Man' called Iron John. Iron John was in touch with his nature and his masculine energy and eventually helped the man - who was 'lost' - to discover, embrace and accept a vigorous masculinity that include a 'warrior' energy while at the same time developing emotional centredness. Mythopoets believe that men must access all sides of their psyches – post-Jungian archetypes such as king, warrior, lover and magician as described by Moore and Gillette (2002) – in order to be "integrated" or complete beings; denial of these sides - including the "shadow" aspects that are unfulfilled desires, themselves often denied (due to shame brought on, according to post-Jungians,

by social mores) -- leads to addiction, violence to self and others and to depression.

According to these authors, this crisis is due to a lack of positive male mentorship, rites of passage and effective fathering (Kahn, 2002:531).<sup>5</sup> The lack of effective fathering is, according to the mythopoeists, due to changes in men's economic roles post-Industrial Revolution - which saw fathers moving from agricultural and artisan settings based at the home, to factory and corporate settings away from the home, and hence away from their sons. Bly posits that because these sons grew up solely with mothers' nurturing, they filled the voids of their fathers' non-presence with negative stereotypes of fathers and men in general. Mythopoeists are also concerned with the costs of hegemonic masculinity: emotional distance (especially from fathers), emotional "wounding" ('psychological damage' in post-Jungian speak) and men not able to speak their emotions, to name a few. These all combine to make up the pain that mythopoeists are aiming to address through their therapeutic approach.

Such a form of "masculinity therapy" argues that modern and contemporary definitions of masculinities as constructed through social norms – whether the hegemonic masculinity 1950s, stoic, cowboy figure or the post-1970s feminism soft, green, "nice boy" – are essentially inaccurate and incomplete, that men have lost their true ("sacred") masculinity (Connell 1995: 210). The only way to reclaim that essential masculinity is by locating men's instinctual, wild, original selves (Bly's "Wild Man") through ritual, drumming and initiation by other men (Kimmel 1997: 17). Mythopoeic men's groups "use stories, myths and poetry as vehicles to access ... inner emotions, inner realities and feelings" in order to "re-mythologize" the man and masculinity for contemporary times [i.e. in response to the above-mentioned "crisis"] (Barton: 2000: 264).

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<sup>5</sup> Not only male authors wrote about a "crisis in masculinity". See also Faludi 1999.

It is precisely the absence of ritual, mentorship and integration, according to the mythopoeists, that leads to what they call “destructive masculinity”. Moore and Gillette (2002) write that “the masculine developmental trajectory floods young males with instinctual aggressive energy ... before life experience can provide wisdom for the modulation of these energies.” The absence of initiation rituals, they continue, “has left us in a situation in which the immature expression of male aggression terrorizes the global community” (ibid.) This aggression, according to mythopoeists, if not channelled correctly, explains warfare, abuse of the environment, and violence against women, against other men and, ultimately, against individual men on a personal level (in the form of addictions, egocentric behaviour and failed relationships). Consequently, it is argued, modern men need to be mentored to re-find a sense of personal mission, as well as to become accountable (to themselves and others) – two essential aspects of masculinity that, according to the mythopoeists, have been lost. Only when men “remythologize the man and his masculinity so that he discovers and acts on his feelings in a socially constructed culture that denies them to him” will they be able to (re)transform themselves as accountable, compassionate, harmonious, strong and integral beings, according to the mythopoeists (Barton, 2003:1).

This mentorship can only be done in large groups and by other men, the mythopoeists believe. Bill Kauth wrote of the power of peer support groups for men in his *A Circle of Men: The Original Manual for Men's Support Groups* (1992). Mythopoeists hold that only men can ‘initiate’ other men in rediscovering their ‘essential masculinities’; sons must break from their mothers as part of their initiatory journey. Keen’s immensely influential *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (1992:16) posits that men need to free themselves from being controlled by their beliefs and myths about women (written “WOMAN” to denote an idealized form and not individual, real women) by wandering in the world of men and going on self-exploratory journeys before being able to come back together in a healthy way with women.

The mythopoetic movement is primarily limited in geographical terms to the well-resourced countries of the north and claims mostly middle class, white men as its constituency. The best-known and largest of the mythopoetic men's groups is the ManKind Project. MKP-I today serves as an umbrella organization for 43 centres that run training programmes in eight countries that have seen almost 45,000 men take its flagship New Warrior Training Adventure (NWTA) course (explained in more detail, below).<sup>6</sup> South Africa is the only developing country that hosts a ManKind Project centre. (A centre is allowed to run trainings under the guidance of MKP-I).

Notable offshoots of the mythopoetic movement include Christian mythopoetic men's groups that preach traditional familial roles based on gender as well as some of the other mythopoets aspects (e.g. accountability, mission). Some of the more popular religious mythopoetic men's groups, such as the Promise Keepers, have drawn crowds of up to at least 350,000 at events in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

### **Criticisms of the Mythopoetic Movement**

While Bly's approach and message was enthusiastically embraced by the American public, men who had aligned themselves to feminist goals (often termed 'profeminists') reacted with dismay. Amongst the first to criticize Bly and the mythopoetic movement was prominent gender theorist R W (now Raewyn) Connell (1992). He pointed out that many of the claims in Bly's book were poorly founded. The anthropology (e.g. Native American sweat lodge) that was selected to justify particular rituals ignored societies where gender socialisation took a different form. Connell also pointed out that women were excluded from mythopoetic activities and suggested that the mythopoets were in fact deeply

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<sup>6</sup> The ManKind Project-International. Online. Internet. [www.mankindproject.org](http://www.mankindproject.org). Accessed January 31 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Often called "the Million Man March", unofficial sources put the 1997 Promise Keepers' Washington, D.C. event crowd figure at one million. According to CNN, the only reliable estimate for the event came from the metro system, which reported 350,000 riders going to the event midway through the day. CNN. "Promise Keepers fill Washington's Mall with prayer". Online. Internet. <http://edition.cnn.com/US/9710/04/promise.keepers.pm/index.html>. Accessed February 09, 2011.

anti-feminist and were attempting to reassert male power over women and to turn back the slender advances made in the name of feminism.

In fact, many profeminist writers (both male and female) have completely written off the capacity of mythopoetic men's groups to promote gender equality. They see them as solely being capable of reinforcing patriarchy. Messner (1997:22) maintains that while men in mythopoetic groups want to stop "paying the costs of being on top", they rarely actively fight gender discrimination and sexism. A few years later, picking up from his original critique, Connell (1995: 88) comments on the need for men to become publicly involved in fighting for women's rights in order to achieve a healthy masculinity (as opposed to only doing the inner work of the conscious-raising groups and the mythopoets).

The mythopoets have also been criticised for replicating inequalities amongst men in greater society – such as homophobia, elitism and racism (Kimmel, in Whitehead 2001: 284). And mythopoetic men's groups have been criticised for focusing on individual men's senses of disempowerment, and forgetting that these mostly white, straight and middle class men, whatever their status, remain part of the category in power. Critics also slate men's mythopoetic groups for depicting men as both powerful and threatening but disempowered by the so-called "crisis in masculinity". Those groups that tend to focus on the costs of being male and on relations between men tend not to focus on gender equality (Connell 2005: 276). Finally, mythopoetic men's groups have been criticised for seeing men as homogeneous – and for espousing a one size fits all solution to the "crisis" (Whitehead 2002: 55).

Certain writers have intimated that the debate about whether or not men's mythopoetic groups can contribute to gender equality is complex. Kaufman (1993: 259), while being scathing of the mythopoetic movement for not recognising patriarchy and for conflating masculinity with sex, concludes by saying that it is the combination of inner work so prevalent in the mythopoetic

movement (to open oneself emotionally) and outer work (to break down the barriers put in place by patriarchy) that will ultimately lead to men's (and women's) liberation. Kuper (1993: 5), reflecting perhaps his psycho-therapeutic background, argues that the personal *is* political and that the men's movement can "relate to the personal needs that cause men to seek change" while they stay focused on the ill results of patriarchy.

Mythopoetic men's work has, therefore, from the start been of interest to gender scholars and particularly to those who work for gender equality. It has also been controversial. Questions continue to be asked about whether mythopoetic work is anti-feminist or whether, in its own way, it contributes to more equitable and healthy gender relations between men and women. These are questions that this thesis takes up.

### **A More Nuanced View – Alternative Critiques of the Mythopoets**

While recognizing these (many valid) criticisms of the mythopoetic men's movement, this dissertation is not about debating these issues – nor, in fact, about debating any masculinities. Rather, it is about turning the gaze to looking at men's processes – to how men report they handle the problems created by hegemonic masculinity, how they describe how they confront a gendered world in relation to self and to how a psychotherapeutic peer support group can assist them to deal with these problems. As such, this dissertation provides a space for some of the men of the contemporary mythopoetic movement to speak of their beliefs, wishes and concerns - versus a plain study of the institutionalisation of male power. For, as Haenfler (2004:78) notes:

While the masculinity literature has greatly expanded our understanding of men and masculinity, there have been few long-term ethnographic studies of men's movements, particularly of young men's, that explain men's understandings of masculinity at the microlevel. Ethnographic work in these contexts will shed light on the dissonance between a movement's rhetoric and the actions of its members; rhetoric may be more for public display and less reflective of members' actual lived experience. The general characterizations of men's movements may obfuscate individual variations within the group.

I argue that there needs to be room for a more nuanced and inclusive view of mythopoetic men's groups, that their activities may in fact promote certain aspects of gender equality among elite men, and, as such, these groups should not be dismissed outright for their perceived inability to contribute to gender equality.

In order to test this argument, I draw on observations about some of the main activities of the largest mythopoetic men's group in South Africa, the ManKind Project-South Africa™, to examine their reported effects on several aspects of inter-personal and social relations regarded in Gender Studies as key determinants of gender equity: elite straight men's ability to express their feelings and men's engagement with fatherhood / father-son relations, elite men's relationships with Others and their willingness to engage in pro-feminist work.

I first define gender equality, elite men and hegemonic masculinity as used in this dissertation. I then provide a survey of the men's movement terrain globally, and where the mythopoetic movement fits into the spectrum. I provide a quick survey of the various men's movements in South Africa before describing the history, structure, membership demographics and activities of the MKP-SA. I explain my involvement in this mythopoetic men's group and my research methodology. My research findings are divided into two categories: the effects of the activities on elite men's relations amongst themselves; and the effects of the activities on elite men's relations with others and their willingness to do pro-feminist work. Finally, I draw some conclusions concerning the effects of the activities of this MKP-SA on South African elite men regarding gender equality.

### **Gender Equality / Gender Equity**

The terms "gender equality" and "gender equity" are often used interchangeably. I use them in this study to mean something broader than equality of law between males and females, as guaranteed in the South African Constitution and many other legal documents. These legal frameworks often serve as injunctions

against discrimination, rather than prerequisites for building a healthy society. And in South Africa, the gap between aspirational and realised equality is all too visible (see Morrell et al 2009, 9-11). Rather, I mean gender equality to mean facilitating the conditions by which all persons can lead healthy lives. Thus, according to my definition, gender equality needs structural, legal and personal changes in order to be realised. As beneficiaries of a patriarchal capitalist system, elite men have an important part to play (both negative and potentially positive) in these changes.

### **Elite is as Elite Does**

By “elite” men I mean those men who can exercise power through networks or instruments, who earn well above the national average and who are better educated than most men (and women). But, as Bourdieu (1984: 483), argues class is more about the way a certain category of people consumes than it is about the way they fit into a classical Marxian relations of production definition. Increasingly and especially with the people 30 and younger, we see a class of people that fit all the criteria above *and* are consuming meaning - in fact, are demanding a sense of purpose besides making money or gaining power – at various Large Group Awareness Trainings, festivals, workshops and retreats. On any given weekend in Cape Town, it is possible to attend a dance class, a lecture on spirituality, a workshop or a festival. And it is the same people who are circulating through these events. They are elite but are not necessarily concerned only with gaining material wealth or power but also with their inner world – what they call spirituality, creativity, meaning and message – and they have and use their resources to pursue this course. It is members of this class of people that make up the respondents of the study.

Elite is not fixed or immutable, either. Donaldson (1993, 651), writing about the complexity of the term “hegemonic masculinity”, notes that there are also different faces of “elite”. He describes observers’ vastly different takes on Rupert Murdoch – from ruthless to charming – and asks, “If the public face of hegemonic

masculinity is not necessarily even what powerful men are, then what are they necessarily? Why is it no mean feat to produce the kind of people who can actually operate a capitalist system?" There is no one fixed definition for elite men and the men of the MKP-SA are not all the same in personality, talents, outlooks (political and otherwise) or behaviour.

Like everything, "elite", too, has gradations. While the data show that most men who join the MKP-SA fit the above income and education criteria (see Demographics of the MKP-SA, Chapter Two), they are not all in the *supreme* elite of society; but in the South African equity landscape with its huge wealth disparities, they certainly can be said to represent one part of the elite. Nor does South African elite mean elite on a global scale; the men that Donaldson (1998) describes as elite – the Murdochs and Prince Charleses of this world – are in a class such that their global name recognition means that they are just that – uniquely elite. The MKP men I interviewed were elite by South African standards but not in the name recognition league in the country – never mind globally. There is also a continuum of elite *among* the men of the MKP-SA - some men are more wealthy or educated than others, for example - that plays itself out in ways that show that the men of MKP-SA have both similar and different experiences and are both homogeneous and heterogeneous. We must be mindful, then, of the possibility of different identities within this classification, and see how respondents work with the identity of "elite" within the men's group, as well as how the minority of members (i.e. those who are not "elite") see their identities at work within the group.

And, finally, as Morrell (1996: 19) notes, class reproduction is not automatic, nor is it consistent: "individual actions do contribute to class identity and profile, but they may also be incongruent, contradictory, ill-fitting and unrepresentative of the class at large." He goes on to note that class and gender identity is "formed and acted out in highly complex ways" (ibid.), most often through repeated patterns, and that individuals can come to realise that they no longer fit comfortably into a

specific class. Class and identities do not automatically perpetuate themselves but are fluid and can be changed by individuals. The men of the MKP-SA and other mythopoetic groups can change or adapt their class and gender identities. This includes, critically, their relationship with hegemonic masculinity.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Hegemonic masculinity is the prevalent and most valued expression of manhood (Connell, 1995) and consists (as with elitism, to varying degrees and on a continuum) of competition, hierarchy, dominance, aggression, individualism over cooperation, (perceived) sexual prowess, physical toughness, rationality, emotional distance and risk taking. Hegemonic masculinity legitimates patriarchy; thus, any attempt to assess the effects of the activities of a men's group on gender equality must look at the effects of these activities on hegemonic masculinity.

It is precisely these characteristics of patriarchy that the men's liberation movement claims have caused men (and women) a lot of pain and disease, and that many of these movements (including the mythopoets) want to change (Haenfler, 2004: 77).

## 2. MARCHING TO A MALE TUNE

Beginning in the United States and Canada in the eighties, men's movements have grown steadily both in terms of numbers and political diversity from what was gingerly described as a singular movement of white, middle class men who had adopted "the central issues of the women's movement" (Shiffman 1987: 295). A decade later, Michael Messner (1997: 11) could identify eight distinct strands of the men's movements based on political and socio-demographic affiliation, but largely distinguished by their relation to gender justice: pro-feminist, anti-feminist (or "backlash") and sexual or racially defined movements. And almost another decade later, Morrell (2005) made the important distinction between "movements of men" and "men's movements" – the former being groupings of large numbers of men e.g. an army or a sports team, and the latter (which is the subject of this dissertation), signifying sets of men that have gathered around a common discourse of gender. But the most useful distinction for understanding men's groups is that between "men's movements" (which are reactionary and concerned with perceived losses of power and how to regain these positions) and the "new men's movement" which works for gender equality, often in tandem with women's groups (Connell 2005: 276).

Many of the early new men's movements focused on taking political action to ally themselves with feminist discourses and causes, and are seen as sitting on the left of the political spectrum; perhaps the best known of these is the American National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS), now in its thirty-sixth year<sup>8</sup>. Today, these pro-feminist and radical feminist groups ally themselves with

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<sup>8</sup> NOMAS. [www.nomas.org](http://www.nomas.org) Online. Internet. Accessed February 08, 2011.

women's groups, and see men trying to make a difference through marches and / or supporting women's struggles. Examples include abortion rights groups, trade union associations fighting for equal pay, and, most effectively, anti-violence-against-women men's groups. And these activist groups seemed to have touched a nerve among men (perhaps due to their hands-on, solutions-oriented mentality – as opposed to the consciousness-raising groups such as those discussed below). A prime example is the White Ribbon Campaign, established after the massacre of 14 women at the University of Montreal in 1989, which saw, according to Kaufman (1993: 259), one out of every 10 Canadian men supporting it in its second year.<sup>9</sup>

A second strand of the contemporary men's movement is what is called "men's consciousness raising groups". These comprise mostly middle class men who are tackling masculinity issues and the costs of hegemonic masculinity through introspection and individual expression. Victor Seidler's work (1992) describes various ways men have found spaces to express themselves individually within groups – artistically, therapeutically, in mixed sex groups, sexually, in alternative therapies. He also notes the importance of these expressions for men, which, he says, allows them to find a release for the tension between the inner world – complex, contested and complicated – and that of the patriarchal capitalist outer world, with its clear lines of delineation and task. Seidler (1991) also describes how certain men joined men's consciousness raising groups, like Achilles Heel, in order to find authentic (i.e. not anti-male) ways to break sexism through learning to become healthily independent of women by expressing their emotions to other men. These men's consciousness raising groups recognise the tension between political and personal work but reject the notion that the personal is navel gazing or not necessary for men (seeing as they owned most of the public spaces already). Kaufman (1993: 259) agrees, describing such consciousness raising groups as important settings to break down barriers between men as a

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<sup>9</sup> Though not the writer, who was a student in Montreal at the time and was involved in a men's consciousness-raising group (see below).

necessary first before positive spin-offs are seen in relations between participating men and their women partners. What is key here is the notion that men must learn to break their patterns of dominance (hegemonic masculinity) over other men (especially, heterosexual men over homosexual men, white men over men of other race categories<sup>10</sup> and middle class men over working class men) before they can begin to break these patterns in relation to women.

“Men’s rights groups” are concerned with entrenching patriarchy and defending men from the gains of feminism. Examples include custody rights groups (for men), anti-women’s rights groups and all-male clubs. Like the “men’s rights” strand, the mythopoetic strand of the men’s movement is seen to be ideologically conservative. This is mostly due to its members’ belief that modern men are experiencing the “crisis of masculinity” due to their being misplaced (materially, identity-wise and leadership-wise) as a result of some of the pro-feminist and feminist advancements of the last three decades.

Finally, special interest men’s movements, such as gay liberation and racialized men’s groups (for example, the African-American Million Man March organised by Minister Louis Farrakhan in 1995), show that the contemporary men’s movement is not homogenous.

So, by the late nineties and continuing to today, the men’s movement terrain was diverse, with pro-women groups, anti-feminist or “backlash” groups, racial and sexual identity groups and those located somewhere in the middle.

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<sup>10</sup> South Africa’s socio-political landscape continues, in the post-apartheid era, to be marked by various terms being used to describe socio-cultural difference. Although there is no clearly demonstrable causal relationship between those differences and phenotypical differences, it remains common in South Africa to elide the two, in part to accommodate recent affirmative action policies. I have done so here because it reflects the kind of terminology used within MKP-SA, although I have not used the phrase ‘men of colour’ despite it having been commonly used in MKP-SA circles to describe black members. Where I use the label ‘coloured’, I refer to those people who, in terms of apartheid-era legislation, were neither white nor black (previously Bantu; native).

### **Local is Lekker – The men’s movement terrain in South Africa**

In the South African context, there is gender equality work being done (largely in the realm of violence and AIDS) but there is also psycho-therapeutic work on the go in single-sex settings. Studies of the men’s mythopoetic movement are only just beginning to appear on the domestic front. Thus, in 2002, Robert Morrell described the terrain of local men’s studies:

A third type of men's organisation can be defined by its response to the "crisis of masculinity." These organisations focus on the costs of masculinity and pay little attention to either the issue of the patriarchal dividend or of accommodating men from outside the mainstream. There are many such organisations [in South Africa]. At the micro level, small groups of white middle-class men hold consciousness-raising sessions. This mirrors developments in Europe and America and has some connections with the mythopoetic impulse, though the scale of this American initiative is not matched in South Africa where introspection and personal transformation are normally tackled in the privacy and safety of suburban houses in the company of like-minded, racially similar men. There are no wildmen retreats for South African men (2002:322).<sup>11</sup>

Morrell goes on to note that, in terms of gender politics, the effect of the mythopoetic men’s groups in South Africa is insignificant – due to its fragmented, closet nature (the Promise Keepers, as noted above, is very large in terms of numbers and very public; however, their events are just that – events – and sporadic). But what these organisations do tell us is that South African men are very concerned about their places in society, in the family and in relation to each other. And, Morrell notes (2005: 284), these “male cost” groups such as those comprising mythopoets have the capacity – as they engage and search for alternatives to hyper-masculinity – to make real contributions to society, or, alternatively, to retreat into striving to “restore the patriarchal family” (as seen with the Promise Keepers).

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<sup>11</sup> Morrell does not provide detail or explain exactly what he means when he writes that there were 'no wildmen retreats' in South Africa. He originally published this piece in 2002 and so it was probably written in 2001. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity, it should be noted that MKP-SA was founded in 2000, which means that, despite the impression given to the contrary by Morrell, formal mythopoetic work was taking place in South Africa at least by the year 2000 even if the scale of such work was not great.

Two extremely popular home-grown South African men's movements are Christian mythopoetic groups: Angus Buchan's Mighty Men drew an estimated 300,000 men to a small town in the Western Cape in April 2010<sup>12</sup> while the Promise Keepers drew 30,000 men and boys of all races at its launch in 1999 (Morrell 2002). Most secular mythopoetic men's groups in South Africa are little-known. One, MensTrust Southern Africa, runs retreat weekends called "Gatherings of Men" and stresses "communication and community - a new sense of togetherness".<sup>13</sup> The most popular of South Africa's mythopoetic men's groups - and the one that provided a study space for this dissertation - is the ManKind Project-South Africa.

### **"The Brotherhood" - the ManKind Project-South Africa**

ManKind Project South Africa ("MKP-SA") is a men's mythopoetic group that defines itself as a "world class men's training and education organisation."<sup>14</sup> As part of its training and education, it purports to offer "mature masculinity" (which it defines as accountability, authenticity, compassion, generosity, integrity, multicultural awareness and respect), initiation and connection to feeling. MKP-SA rhetoric claims that through achieving a mature form of masculine identity men will be able to create social structures that will in turn foster peace, safety and accountability.

The organisation markets, plans and runs various courses (called trainings) out of two cities (Cape Town and Johannesburg) - all of which are bound by protocols and processes set down by MKP-I (to which MKP-SA pays fees per every man who passes through the courses). The courses include introductory, one-day long facilitated, group workshops designed to expose men to its view of masculinity and to allow men to "touch a part of their soul" away from "the noise

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<sup>12</sup> "Huge Crowd Gathers at South African Men's Conference", Assist News Service. Online. Internet. <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2010/s10040137.htm> Accessed May 4, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> The Men's Trust Southern Africa. 2010. Online. Internet. <http://www.menstrust.org.za>. Accessed May 4, 2010. See Bamford (2004) for an interview and description of their activities.

<sup>14</sup> The ManKind Project-South Africa (2010). Online. Internet. Accessed May 14, 2010.

of everyday society”<sup>15</sup>: Its *Crossing the Threshold* course centres around a “Hero’s Journey” where men tackle a perceived life issue in a facilitated psychodrama; its *Head, Heart and Soul* course claims to show men the connection of intellect, emotion and spirit.<sup>16</sup>

The courses are run as preludes to the organisation’s flagship men’s initiatory training, a form of Large Group Awareness Training called the *New Warrior Training Adventure* (“NWTa” or “the Weekend”), a retreat carried out over the course of a weekend, usually in a rural setting, and which combines group discussions, ritual, role-playing, guided visualisations, journaling and psychodrama, the details of which MKP-I requires to be kept secret. For that reason, participants sign a non-disclosure clause, something also required at the beginning of their initial Integration Group training cycle. During the NWTa, participants are also led through a guided visualization in order to find a “mission” or life purpose unique to each participant and encouraged to think of ways that they will enact their mission in real life.

*Honouring Ceremonies* are open to the public and are held three days after a NWTa’s completion. There the NWTa leadership recognises (“honours”) those men (“the new brothers”) who have recently completed the course, and where these men speak of their experiences on the course and partners speak of the changes they have witnessed in the men since their return from the course. Besides the NWTa and the Integration Group trainings, MKP-SA also runs facilitation courses – called Basic Staff Development Trainings – in its own prescribed and copyrighted protocols.

Full membership of MKP-SA is only through completion of the NWTa and the subsequent Integration Group (“I-Group”) cycle. The latter comprises eight facilitated training sessions that teach NWTa graduates various emotional

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<sup>15</sup> The ManKind Project-South Africa (2010). Online. Internet. Accessed May 14. 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, Centre Director, MKP-SA May 2010.

literacy technologies and continue the psychodrama, guided visualisations, group discussions, and rituals experienced on the course. The I-Groups are formed in terms of the geographical location of NWTA graduates' places of residence, and usually comprise between eight and twelve men who meet bi-monthly basis at members' houses. Men who have completed both of the NWTA and the I-Group cycle are allowed to facilitate ("staff") NWTAs and the organisation's other trainings.

MKP-SA also carries out activities that its members believe will contribute to South African society. These have included workshops for men in prisons, facilitation of the Boys to Men organisation that mentors boys ([www.boystomen.org](http://www.boystomen.org)); and the running of fatherhood talk shops, talking circles for men, and workshops around gender sensitivity – all for non-members. The organisation awards its Ron Hering Award annually to members who, from the perspective of the leadership, have made outstanding contributions to bettering society outside the organisation. Awardees have included men who have started an addiction centre, started an Aids orphanage and conducted environmental training. MKP-SA has also held (unofficial) co-trainings with WomenWithin ([www.womenwithin.org](http://www.womenwithin.org)), also a mythopoetic psychotherapeutic group and one MKP-SA calls its sister organisation.<sup>17</sup>

While its numbers remain small when compared to the Mighty Men or the Promise Keepers, MKP-SA has grown steadily in terms of membership and geographic reach. By May 2010, 29 NWTA courses had been held in South Africa. With each NWTA including around 40 men, there are currently approximately 1,081 New Warriors in South Africa, the majority (70%) hailing from the Western Cape. The Cape Town area boasts an estimated ten to twenty I-Groups, some of which have been running for over five years.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 'Unofficial' due to MKP-SA's fear of litigation if these trainings were held in the organisation's name. Council meeting, 2004

<sup>18</sup> The ManKind Project-South Africa Membership records. Accessed May 2010.

By and large, membership demographics are similar to those of mythopoetic men's groups in North America (see, for example, Mankowski et al 2000, 187; Richard 2000, 166 and Pentz 2000, 213). I collected demographic data about MKP-SA's membership using a questionnaire that asked age, income, marital, parental, education and employment status at the time of participating in the NWTAs (see below for more information on methods and Appendix for questionnaire). Of course, these findings are based on the cohort that returned the questionnaire, and therefore reflect a mean of the returnees rather than the entire MKP-SA membership. However, the results reflect what can be seen from the general membership.

The questionnaire respondents were predominantly middle-aged, well-educated, urban, wealthy, white, straight, English-speaking, professional, married fathers, with some followers of non-traditional religions. Their mean age at time of entering MKP-SA (i.e., signing up for the NWTAs) was 43.6 years.<sup>19</sup> Eighty-five percent were university-educated, many having completed a Master's degree or higher. Almost all were working in professional or semi-professional occupations. The majority reported earning over R10,000 per month and lived in suburban areas. The NWTAs fee of R2, 950.00 is such that only the wealthiest of South African men can afford to join MKP-SA. The major stumbling block to getting a full NWTAs group (forty men) who were black, coloured and/or Indian<sup>20</sup>, according to the organisation, is financial.<sup>21</sup>

In a country where race and class are still almost synonymous, it not surprising that membership is primarily white (over eighty percent) and English-speaking

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<sup>19</sup> MKP-SA has a policy of not accepting men under the age of eighteen on the NWTAs – for fear of litigation.

<sup>20</sup> Race category labels in the South African context are fraught. Throughout this dissertation I use the terminology of the late apartheid state when referring to race i.e. "black" means "Black-African" and excludes coloured and Asian/Indian. I do this because my respondents used this terminology in their replies. No respondents self-identified as "Chinese" or "Indian"; I have encountered one member who is Chinese but no Indians.

<sup>21</sup> Pers. Comm., Centre Director, May 2010. MKP-SA began application to the South African Revenue Service for non-profit status in 2004 but has still not obtained such status.

(over sixty-five percent). However, in order to increase diversity of membership along race lines, MKP-SA runs various introductory trainings for black and coloured men at minimal or no charge, and it does offer bursaries, including full bursaries, based on race, sexual orientation and class to men who complete the introductory trainings and express interest in going on a NWTAs. The organisation ensures that at least fifteen to twenty per cent of facilitators on each NWTAs are black or coloured men (the fee to facilitate is R600.00), which represents the same percentage of men in MKP-SA who self-identify as black or coloured,<sup>22</sup> hence, the same few black and coloured men are almost always part of each NWTAs facilitation group. Black and coloured men are actively – and financially – supported by the organisation’s leadership body to move up its ranks (currently, two of four of the organisation’s highest ranking facilitators are coloured, though both are wealthy in their own right); the organisation sponsors their travel expenses to take trainings and to attend leadership meetings.) The organisation has also had an eight-year relationship with men from an NGO in Khayelitsha called Embizweni – and has successfully sent through three or four men from this group (now a core group of township black men) for facilitation. It also organises “Diversity Days” that consist of music, drama and tours of townships.<sup>23</sup> There are very few foreigners in MKP-SA, although foreign leaders are brought in to run the NWTAs. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents listed themselves as straight.

Over half the questionnaire respondents indicated that they have no formal religious connections – they are either agnostic or atheist (the questionnaire did not enquire as to what religions members were brought up in, if any), and approximately one-quarter of members claimed commitment to New Age belief systems (including Emissaries of Light and Seekers) as their religions. My profile was very similar to the mean of the respondents of this study when I joined the MKP-SA: white, university-educated and English-speaking.

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<sup>22</sup> According to results of questionnaire sent by email by organisation’s leadership in late 2010. Pers. Comm., Centre Director, Feb 2011. One-quarter of members filled in the e-survey.

<sup>23</sup> Pers. Comm., Centre Director, May 2010

### **3. BAND OF BROTHERS**

My first experience with a men's group was in my undergraduate years in the early nineties when my brother, a friend, Ethan, and I started "A Place for Ethan", a talking circle for men in reaction to what we perceived was a lack of space for male students to talk about their experiences. The group, which was influenced by a men's consciousness raising group approach, was open to men and women, but was torpedoed by the Women's Union of McGill University.

I first heard about the ManKind Project in 2002 from my older brother, who said he had attended the "life changing" training in Cape Town and that I would (as he said he had) "get a lot out of it". Thirty-two, and living in Vancouver, Canada, at the time, I was experiencing many personal and professional difficulties, including emotional distance from my then wife (we had just experienced an abortion), career frustration and (self-imposed) estrangement from my family. When he told me of the organization, I looked up the course on the Internet but felt that it was too expensive and time consuming.

The following year, while on holiday in Cape Town and newly separated from my wife, I signed up for the February NWTA. I can now no longer remember quite why though, as I show, many men enter the organization at a time in their lives when they are experiencing relationship difficulties and are searching for purpose or direction. I completed the NWTA and follow-up I-Group trainings in March and April before returning to Vancouver to settle my affairs there (I had meanwhile decided to divorce and return to live in South Africa). While in Canada, I participated in an I-Group and as a "Man of Service" (cook) on an NWTA in Alberta. I also decided to change careers and entered the MA programme in Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town as a means to facilitate that change.

## **Into the Fire – Research Methodology**

Formal research for this dissertation took place over four months in 2005 and included participant-observation, surveying, informal conversations, formal interviewing, email list-serve monitoring, and a review of organisational literature. (The year prior I conducted an exploratory interview for a course of a MKP-SA member and his spouse on the meaning of participation in the organisation; the process and ideas helped me to fine-tune interview questions and methodology.)

Participant observation took place in five different Integration Groups for a total of over twenty hours (I visited one twice), two Council meetings, a social event (a Father-Son hike at Krom Rivier, an hour's drive outside Cape Town), at the organization's Annual General Meeting (AGM – also known as the Summer Meeting for the business affairs and “the picnic” that includes partners and children as the social aspect), at a visit by the Centre Director to Embizweni (the men's NGO in Khayelitsha), as well as at one “Honouring Ceremony”.<sup>24</sup>

In order to gain access to I-Groups for my research, I posted an email on the organisation's general email list-serve outlining my research plans/intentions and asking for I-Groups to allow participant-observation during at least one of their meetings. I assured confidentiality. I put out a call on the email list-serve to I-groups to host me, and the response proved very positive. I chose I-Groups from various geographic locations and age sets. Two of the five I-Groups which agreed to my conducting participant observation were struggling with retention rates (and thought that my work might assist them); another was one with which I had had extensive personal contact.

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<sup>24</sup> The Council said that I could only do participant-observation at the NWTAs if I got permission from all facilitators. While I have facilitated NWTAs since joining the MKP-SA, I decided that to do so for the sake of this study would have been too time-consuming and that most probably some of the other facilitators would have dissented, meaning I would be facilitating with its expense and tiresome activity for naught.

During this phase, I was looking for patterns of participation, leadership, communication, socialising and decision-making. I noted the differing roles that ritual played in the sites, and recorded the use of MKP protocol and processes – where they differed from the handbook and what effects these changes had on the groups' cohesiveness. I also asked men about group evolution, member compatibility and dropout issues. Finally, I tried to gauge the ease of facilitation skills in the groups – and possible connections with the training the men had received in the initial Integration Group training cycle or on other MKP courses, and participation rates.

No member expressed any negativity to my conducting research at these events and many were encouraging, asking me how the research was progressing and expressing interest in my findings. All of the men in these I-Groups were generally open to discussing these findings and to my returning to repeat participant observation.

I found the MKP-SA Council meetings extremely informative as a means to see how the leadership deals with issues of race and accessibility, as well as to observe how decisions were made – including censure and sidelining.

I sent a questionnaire to the general email list-serve. It aimed at assessing socio-demographic information, participation levels and individual wants and needs from a men's group. It asked members to list age, education, occupation, religion, income, race, mother language, and place of residence. Further, the questionnaire enquired about participants' reasons for joining a men's group and how they originally heard about the organisation. The questionnaire also asked respondents to list current levels of participation in the organisation (I-Group statuses, histories and reasons for non-participation). Finally, participants were asked what additional activities they would like to see the organisation sponsoring – including social development activities. Participants were also asked what they believe constitutes a 'community' – and how well MKP-SA

manages to achieve this sense of community.<sup>25</sup> This questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

Nineteen or 6.8% of the then membership returned the questionnaire by email or mail. Some members expressed dismay at the high number of emails on the organisation list-serve, preferring to merely scan or ignore it.<sup>26</sup> The questionnaire took an estimated 45 minutes to complete, which in itself may have been a reason for low numbers of return. Some members did not want colleagues, family or any other part of society to know that they were doing “men’s work” (read: psycho-therapeutic facilitation) or that they were part of a men’s group. (In all communications, I repeatedly assured members that I would keep all data confidential. I understood, too, that the Council was nervous should personal identifiable information be released, and that members may have held the leadership accountable should I release personal information to the public.) Approximately one-third of the returnees were men whose I-Groups I had visited in participant observation, indicating that they had reached a level of comfort or confidence with me as researcher, and with my project, to invest further effort and time by completing and submitting the questionnaire.

Throughout the study I engaged in numerous conversations with informants and personal contacts within the organisation, both informally and formally. These included follow-ups to interviews, personalised emails and telephone calls. Many members of the organisation provided data while enquiring as to the status of my study in conversations, often proffering explanations for member retention/dropout or their experiences in the organisation’s structures.

Personal communication with members occurred regularly on an informal basis. Most of the men active in the organisation (e.g., Council members, regular NWTAs staffers) were aware of my research and approached me frequently to ask about

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<sup>25</sup> The questions were constructed with the assistance of Doctor Edward Read Barton.

<sup>26</sup> Various emails, organisational list-serve, April 15-24, 2005

the research's progress. I used these opportunities to ask their opinions on the research question. Often these conversations occurred whilst sharing rides, on the fringes of MKP-sponsored activities and events, and in social situations. Again, my (relatively) long and active history in the organisation – and, I suspect, my older brother's involvement – allowed me to have social and networking opportunities with other members that were especially useful. Once told I was conducting research on the organisation, most MKP-SA men were very open and encouraging.

Eleven formal interviews were conducted with men selected by varying levels of participation in the organisation—from little participation in the organisation (6) to very active participation in the organisation (5). While I did win the trust of many members (e.g. in the I-Groups where I was a participant-observer), the majority of my interviewees were those men with whom I already had a strong personal relationship i.e. from my own I-Group or those that I had helped facilitate on the NWT. Personal connection and witnessing counted a lot for gaining access, time and commitment to research subjects. Most interviews lasted 1.5 hours and all were tape-recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were given a consent form to sign and had their rights explained verbally by me prior to interviews being conducted. Interview questions took the men through their history with MKP, from how they became interested in MKP to their present participation levels, and the reasons for those participation levels. Members' experiences in MKP-SA have been partly of a deep emotional/psychological nature, and men may have been unwilling to participate in this research for fear of dredging up and making public past emotional/psychological traumas – at least two men indicated to me that they were surprised how “easy” the interviews had been, as they were expecting some process that would have forced them to relive traumatic psychological experiences. During interviews, I tried to be humorous, casual and set participants at ease. I recognised that interviewees might be wary of criticising MKP-SA if they thought that their identities would be revealed at a later date (due to possible sanctions from the organisation e.g. to be disallowed from

facilitation). To this end, I constantly reassured participants that their confidentiality was guaranteed. I also purposely shared some of my own background in order to make participants feel at ease to open up about their life stories.

I monitored two MKP-SA email list-serves for a period of four months – the general list-serve for all members and the Council list-serve. I searched for discussions to do with participation, drop-out, vision, demographics, logistics, strategy and decision-making, collecting twenty strings of emails following these topics. All members were made aware that I would be monitoring the list-serves, although I did not participate myself in most of these discussions.

My final research site was the organisational literature, of which I conducted an extensive review. This included MKP-SA's websites and other promotional materials, as well as magazine articles on the organisation written by members and non-members. The data from the organisational literature assisted in creating a chart of organisational terminology – and in understanding what that meant to an outsider versus an insider.

### **When the Sharing Circle is not Enough – Limitations of the Study**

There are, of course, certain limitations to this study. First, the data – from all sources (I-Groups and other organisational activities), questionnaires and personal conversations, emails list-serves *and* interviews) – is skewed, as participants were *literally* those most active. If they were not in the organisation's leadership and facilitation positions (which approximately one-fifth were), then they were participating in my various research activities. It is difficult to get around this constraint in a research project of this kind, and to obtain data from those who are inactive in an organisation (besides using personal networking, as I did with six of my interviewees). And as Mankowski et al (2000: 187) note, one of the drawbacks with this kind of research is that, without being able to construct a defined cohort, those who are less enthusiastic about MKP will not have

returned questionnaires or participated in any other aspect of the research (interviews, etc.).

A second limitation derives from the small numbers of respondents. As only 19 members completed the questionnaire and 11 members completed interviews, of a total then MKP-SA membership of 367 (5.2% and 3.6%, respectively), the findings are reliant on a very small number of members.

To conclude, in order to test whether there is room for a nuanced and inclusive view of mythopoetic men's groups with regard to the effects of their activities on gender equity, research took place in a variety of settings, including participant observation at formal and social activities, formal and informal interviewing, an emailed questionnaire and the monitoring of members' emails.

Let us first turn to the reported effects and observations of some of the main activities of the MKP-SA men's ability to express their feelings, men's engagement with fatherhood / father-son relations and men's gender role comfort, before turning to the effects on elite straight men's relationships with Others and their willingness to engage in pro-feminist work.

#### 4. “CLEARING THE LOGJAM”: REPORTED EFFECTS OF ACTIVITY ON RESPONDENTS’ RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEMSELVES

In this chapter I present the reported effects of the activities on respondents’ relationships with themselves and find that the ability to express their feelings and fathering / father-son relationships emerge as the two most reported aspects of this relationship, and that all are reported as having been positively affected by participating in the activities of the MKP-SA.

Using data from the questionnaire and interviews, I examine **what respondents say about the effects of the activities of this men’s group on themselves**. I do this to ascertain what changes, if any, occurred during the course of – and possibly due to – the activities. The questionnaire asked the respondents to rate their experiences in the organization as important or not. The interview questions ask: ‘How well did the NWTa meet your expectations?’ ‘What did you get out of the NWTa?’ ‘What did you consider valuable about participating in MKP-SA activities?’ I also include comments from partners and children of men who have undergone the activities.

Second, I present some findings, derived mainly from participant observation, to complement the reported interview data. These include evidence of hegemonic masculinity and of spaces for men to play out non-hegemonic masculinity. Finally, I report on what the elite men’s partners said about the effects of the activities on their men.

I use the findings to make **comments on the effects of MKP-SA’s activities on two aspects of gender equality (ability to express their feelings and fathering / father-son relations)** on this particular group of men. I suggest that the findings speak to concerns that the activities of men’s mythopoetic movements are anti-feminist and indicate that these activities have had positive effects on these respondents’ levels of gender equity.

In Chapter Five I examine the effects of the activities on elite straight men's relationship with others (including with men of other races and classes, with men of other sexualities and with women).

### **Reported Effects of Activity on Respondents**

Respondents were asked in the questionnaire and in interviews what they had found were the effects on them of the MKP-SA activities, starting with the NWTAs and moving onto Integration Groups and other activities.

While respondents reports indicated diverse experiences of effects of this mythopoetic men's group's main activities, many men reported personal growth and that they had learned much about masculinity and men, as well as improved their understanding of fathering and father-son relations. Some (mostly gay) respondents reported learning about their sexuality through their experience of the activity. Most respondents reported that they did not experience greater number of friendships or find a new community from the activity. Similarly, most respondents reported that philanthropic and political activities were not important experiences of MKP-SA's activities – with a minority expressing dissatisfaction with this.

Not one respondent reported having experienced no effects of the activities, although they differed as to the reported extent of the effects by the specific activities i.e. NWTAs versus Integration Groups. Most respondents said that the NWTAs was something of a shock to the system (understandably, as it is the first activity and involves intensive processes over a short time and without any break) whereas Integration Groups, which meet once every two weeks and follow a known set of processes and protocols, are more gentle. Some reported that they “got what they needed from the NWTAs” and therefore did not need to continue with the Integration Groups, while a majority maintained that the Integration Groups were of more use than the NWTAs -- possibly due to the depth

of the relationships built up in the Integration Groups and the much longer time spent in them.<sup>27</sup> As with the reporting of the expectations of the activity, many respondents reported a combination of effects.

*Reported Experiences in Mythopoetic Men’s Group – Rated by Importance*

Table two below lists the results of a question on the questionnaire (Question 25) that asked respondents to rate the importance of the given experiences in MKP-SA, tabulated by reason and importance.<sup>28</sup>

<b>Experiences</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Not Important</b>
1) Experimenting in the group by doing or saying new things	6	4	2
2) Sharing thoughts and feelings about being a man	10	2	0
3) Learning about my personality	8	3	1
4) Getting insights into the causes and sources of my problems	7	3	1
5) Examining men’s attitudes towards women	4	5	1
6) Examining men’s attitudes towards other men	6	5	1
7) Examining social/community issues	2	6	3
8) Being confronted and challenged	10	1	1

<sup>27</sup> The MKP has expressed alarm at what it calls the high “dropout” rate i.e. men who no longer continue in any capacity in the organisational activities, either attending Integration Groups, staffing or doing courses. There has been some research on the matter commissioned by the organisation’s Research Arm. Pers. Comm, Ed Barton, 2004. Research by this author and others indicates that men stop attending I Groups due to time pressures (including family), conflicts within the group, geographical distance and/or a feeling that they are not getting sufficient return for their time investment.

<sup>28</sup> N=12. Some respondents did not answer all of the questions so the total for each reason does not always total 12.

9) Examining problems men have with traditional roles (husband, father, etc.)	7	4	1
10) Experiencing support, joy, excitement	7	4	1
11) Learning more about my sexuality	3	6	2
12) Helping others	5	6	0
13) Being part of a group / friends / social	4	4	4
14) Learning problem solving skills	7	1	2
15) Learning that my problems are not unique – finding communion	6	5	0
16) Finding community	4	6	2
17) Building community	3	5	3

**Table Two: List of experiences in men’s group, rated by importance.**

### *Personal Growth*

The majority of respondents reported experiences in MKP-SA activities of a personal growth nature as important. Some of these were purely of an emotional or psychological nature – including ‘experimenting in the group by doing or saying new things’ (83,3% of respondents rated this experience as ‘very important’ to ‘somewhat important’), ‘learning about my personality’ (91,6%), ‘being confronted and challenged’ (91,6%) and ‘experiencing joy, support, excitement’ (91,6%).

Some experiences in the MKP-SA activities rated as important by respondents were more of a self-help nature – such as ‘learning problem solving skills’ (80%), ‘getting insights into the causes and sources of my problems’ (90,1%) and ‘learning that their problems are not unique’ (100%). The interviews bear this out. James, the older Xhosa man who was involved with assisting men in a local

township NGO, said: “I got what I needed [from the NWTa]. I got a sense of knowing myself, knowing what I’ve got to go through. The weekend helped me face up to my problems – even though the same problems remained.”

Adam, who reported that his life was at a logjam, reported that the NWTa activity had assisted him to break the sense of inertia: “I got an incredible sense that every single moment counts. I had a heightened sense of what I do, am, think, feel has meaning.” Another respondent spoke of the activity preparing him for the next step of life.

Stephen, another respondent who reported going through “relationship difficulties” and a “very difficult marriage” at the time of signing up for the activity, also reported the activity providing some form of self-knowledge: “I gained a lot of consciousness from the NWTa in the form of ‘metaphysical bypass training’ – you breathe a little easier. I wish I’d done it two years earlier – I wonder if it would have made a difference to my marriage. Now it’s a moot point” [Stephen and his partner were already divorced]. Stephen also reported that the activity had provided a means for him to feel strong emotions: “The language around feelings didn’t work for me but I’d done a lot of therapy already. [Referring to another process] Initially I had to fake it but at some point I switched over and touched something. I cried a lot. I felt held and contained.”

This sense of ‘being able to feel’ was a theme reported by many respondents. Jack said the following when asked what purpose or meaning he had got from the activities: “Sometimes I go to the I Group and the NWTa and get *emotional steering*, which I don’t get in the rest of my life – the rest of my life is pretty flat [emphasis his].”

Empathy was another feeling reported as a common effect of the activities. Jack revealed the following under close questioning in the interview:

The feeling is that I wasn’t getting any purpose or meaning. But if I had to scratch around [sarcastic], I would say that the purpose or meaning I got

was to share with other guys, a feeling of what they were going through – and it was real stuff: some sort of connection with emotion, *their* emotion more, and me feeling getting involved with that, which I don't get in the rest of my life. I found myself worrying about some of the men to an extent that I don't allow myself in the rest of my *real* life.

Many of the respondents simply reported that the men's group activities allowed them to feel sufficiently safe to express their feelings and to express emotional vulnerability. For many, this was a first with other men.

Adam, who reported that he had always been wary of organizations from his childhood days, said that the activity had assisted him with being aware of his emotional states, especially anger management:

I may think I've made great strides but I've still got issues of anger management. People close to me have noticed a change. I'm able to judge my progress. I've already moved. But I'm never going to be able to behave in a placid, reasonable way. It's highly unlikely I'll move towards expressing myself a placed way. It's a long way away.

Adam said he was not only aware of his emotional states but was also now able to evaluate his personal progress in terms of retaining some sense of healthy expression of emotions.

Such findings are similar to those of international studies of mythopoetic men's groups. Richard (2000, 173) reported that:

The strongest therapeutic component for all of the men surveyed has been the support, sharing, and closeness they felt with other men, which have seemed to 'reawaken' many positive aspects of the men's personalities (emotional expression, clearer communication, and honesty) which may be critical to the development and maintenance of fulfilling relationships.

Richard's study also found that respondents reported closeness and sharing with other men as one of the most important aspects of their experience.

bell hooks (2004, 143-144) writes that learning to speak about their experiences, and especially painful ones, is essential for men to heal from the scars of patriarchy. Yet, she notes, straight men are often interrupted, silenced or

distanced when sharing such feelings with other men and thus “far more likely to share feelings with sexual partners. Men of all ages who want to talk about feelings usually learn not to go to other men.”

The findings above suggest that the activities of MKP-SA are assisting men to show vulnerability and to express emotions in front of other men – and to be heard (one of the teachings on the NWTA is how to listen). hooks also calls for compassion and soul work – things she claims has been devalued by patriarchy (2004, 150).

Not only do the men of the MKP-SA show great compassion to each other (and especially to “initiates” on the NWTA), but the activities encourage participants to express anger [a stage where men often get stuck, according to hooks (2004, 155)], to cry, to show fearfulness (and the shame that goes with that fearfulness in a patriarchal society). In doing so, the activities may well be assisting elite men to make the initial steps to changing patriarchy, or, at the very least, to mitigate the effects of such.

#### *Learning about Masculinity and Men*

Learning about masculinity and men was rated as a very important aspect of the activities by the majority of respondents on the questionnaire. These included ‘sharing thoughts and feelings about being a man’ (100% of respondents rated this experience as ‘very important’ to ‘somewhat important’) and ‘examining men’s attitudes towards other men and towards women’ (91,6%).

The interviews support this. Bill, who was very excited about being in some sort of deep relations with men, said:

I had done a lot of work, experiential workshops, in my studies. Part of my transpersonal work involved a ‘Heroes’ Journey’ and a holotropic workshop, so I think I was quite actualised. For me the power of the experience was connecting with other men. This was the first time that I’d ever been with men in that kind of way, not where there were women around facilitating the workshops with feminine energy....I think I was quite conscious before. The

NWTA was just something I'd never encountered before, in terms of the depth, the aspect of being with men.

Jack, a man who reported not having had many male friends at the time of the activity, gave an interesting description of how the activity changed his sense of masculinity:

I don't know what my definition of masculinity is or was. It's probably softer now than what it used to be. I don't know if I'm saying what I really think or [if I'm saying] the psychobabble. It's okay to be vulnerable, open, caring – I still think that stuff is feminine stuff, not masculine or feminine. I'm more open [post NWTA] inside MKP; outside in real life, maybe emotionally - I don't know.

Johan, a 30-something white Afrikaans man, said that the NWTA reminded him of Navy boarding school experiences when he said: "Men who had been through some shit could comfort me but they would not offer sex, as women do, to contain me. I felt normal as a man [on the NWTA]."

Adam reported that the activities of the men's mythopoetic group had allowed him to feel comfortable with his being a man:

Before MKP, I wanted to be seen as a person, not as a man. MKP has given me comfortable feeling to being a man [repeated once]. Now an absolutely critical part of me is saying, 'I'm a man'. I would not have used the word 'man' or 'men' before the NWTA. I remember the man who introduced me to MKP using the phrase 'meeting a group of men' and finding that an odd turn of phrase. Now I feel strong and powerful and okay to say 'I'm a man'. Before [the activity] I wanted to avoid aspects of masculinity that women fear.

What it seems Adam was expressing was not only that he is more comfortable with his being a man post the activity, but that that part of him that has accepted being a man is an essential part of his identity.

Some respondents who had participated in twelve-step (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous) or other self-help programmes reported that MKP-SA's activities had assisted them to find a sense of their masculinity that they could not find in other peer support groups. When asked as to how participation in MKP was different from participation in another peer support group, John, a self-identified alcoholic who reported having attended Alcoholics Anonymous and who spoke of

having expected the men's group to assist him with initiation and other mythopoetic work, answered:

[Participation in] MKP allows for a communication level which I can't have in other places, where there's no bullshit, where we talk about men's issues. MKP is more men focused, which allows me to hold onto shit we've lost out on - proper communication, contact, empathy with ancestors and fathers, and expressing our feelings.

And George, who self-identified as gay, reported that the activity had assisted him with a self-definition of masculinity within a larger set of other identities:

MKP has helped me with my definition of masculinity within a larger issue of identity. MKP has helped me deal with identity. It is a laboratory where I can learn to play with this identity. Having paid my dues I feel accepted – that's important. Being with problematic identities I find it important to be accepted.

The above findings echo those of other studies. Mankowski et al (2000, 188) found an “enhanced sense of equality with other men, reduction of shame and focus on openness and integrity.” Similarly, Richard (2000: 168) found that “men who have struggled to redefine themselves [in terms of masculinity] and have been successful [in doing so] in the presence of other men.” Such men, said Richard (ibid.), enjoyed the “power of sharing and the joy that results from this rediscovery”. Further, added Richard, his respondents felt a very strong need for models of masculinity – models that express vulnerability, and being able to cry in public. Pentz's (2000: 214) findings were that men are able, as a result of the mythopoetic men's group activity, to speak about “mature masculinity” (i.e. one that fights for gender equality) as different from “destructive masculinity” (i.e. one that derives from and supports patriarchy) – and that this ability to discern between the two is a process.

From the above, one can see that mythopoetic men's group activities, and those of the MKP-SA in particular, allow men to find new models of masculinity that are different and run counter to hegemonic masculinity – and that these discoveries are warmly welcomed by participating men. One also sees that MKP-SA's activities boosted participating men's levels of gender role comfort. Yet, as

discussed in Chapter Five, an extreme focus on men also has its drawbacks for gender equality.

*Improving Participants' Understanding of Fatherhood / Father-Son Relations*

A majority (91,6%) of respondents rated 'examining problems men have with traditional roles (husband, father, etc.)' as being an important aspect of the activities they experienced. Bill, a man who was particularly concerned with learning to be a father, reported that: "MKP helped me to embrace my helplessness...and through the experience of the universality of other men's stories that was very powerful. Just realizing that I'm the same, no different from other men [helped me]." Johan, who had spent time in the navy, reported that one effect of the activity for him was that he could better understand "his father's dynamics" and that he gained a better understanding of his relationship with his father. "He gave me what he could" is how Johan expressed it.

Respondents also reported that the activities assisted them in their father roles. Solomon, a young Zulu man, believed that the activities were responsible for his being able to care alone for an infant for four months:

I had to stay with my child alone until my wife settled down. If I didn't do MKP, I couldn't have the strength to be alone with the baby, clean the baby, feed the baby. I thought children were a women's thing. My parents were amazed that I stayed with the baby, but for me it was natural to stay with the baby. People were amazed. I enjoyed it!

Solomon also said that, before undertaking the NWT, "being a man" had meant "head of the family", "not doing anything" and "women doing everything". After the activity, he said, his definition changed to "being a father" and "being responsible for your actions." For Solomon, then, the activity meant that he could become aware of his responsibilities as a father and be active in the family unit, contributing in a practical way.

I also observed positive effects of the MKP-SA's activities on participating men's fathering and father-son relations. One of the MKP-SA activities that I observed

and whence I gained data about parenting was a Father-Son Hike, held at Krom Rivier about an hour's drive from Cape Town. Of the 34 men who emailed interest, fourteen showed up with four children in tow (three sons and one nephew). None of the adult participants reported ever having been taken hiking by their fathers when they were children. Some non-parent men helped share the burden of care giving whilst on the hike: One expressed concern over a child diving into a pool, another assisted a boy with getting his clothes. Some of the men said that they would like to see a daughters-and-sons hike – but as long as there would be no “gratuitous nudity” (the men swam naked on this hike). What this suggests is that MKP-SA provided a space for participants to undergo new and, for them, positive fathering experiences.

I also observed that some of the children of MKP-SA members had internalized some of the rituals and content of the men's group: three out of the four who attended the hike had taken symbolic totem animal names as done by their fathers on the Nwata. Before the start of the hike, they “checked in” (spoke about their feelings and mindsets) and gave their names (and animal names).<sup>29</sup> MKP-SA also provides a forum for fathers and male children to build a sense of ritual and identity.

#### *Reports of Positive and Negative Experiences*

At the Honouring Ceremony I attended, eleven of the 38 recent Nwata graduates used the word “grateful” to describe their experience of the activity. Nine of them urged other men to go on the training. Seven said that it was a “profound” experience, while six said that it was “empowering”. Other descriptions made by many men included “I am a changed man”, “humbling”, “cynics, give it a try” and “it was important to be witnessed by other men”.

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<sup>29</sup> The challenge, of course, is for the men of the MKP-SA to recognise that this ritual can be passed to their daughters, too - that girls and women also form part of their lineage and ancestry i.e. to become less androcentric – see Chapter Five.

Despite these kinds of positive comments, some participants reported negatively about their experiences of MKP-SA activities. One was that their expectations had not been met. Jack, the man who expressed uncertainty that what he had learned was transferable to the world beyond MKP-SA, said that he had wanted his experiences of the NWTa to provide him with a sounding board through which he could sound out career challenges. Yet he reported in an interview that the training had not met that need; and that he did not get a sense of mission or career direction from the training.

I was quite disappointed after the NWTa – but I wasn't unsure whether I was disappointed with myself or with the training. It was not a massive, life-changing experience for me, though I came home with a resolve to put effort into my marriage and to do things I had learned on the training *decisively* [emphasis his].

Jack said that, after the NWTa, he had remained positive and had changed his behaviour, but only for a while. He later dropped out of his Integration Group saying he felt that participation in MKP did not benefit his life very much.

Similarly, Stephen, who despite reporting in an interview that the NWTa training had exceeded his expectations (he said he had felt “held and contained” and that “something had moved”), also reported that, after some time, he had become disappointed with the training, feeling that the stasis in his career and marriage remained. He also reported negative experiences with his Integration Group training:

I didn't feel that I was trusting the men. When I expressed this, there was a huge averse reaction. They told me to 'Fuck off!' and to 'Leave now!' This was a turning point for me. After that, there was a lot of distrust, misunderstanding and issues with those men since then.

### *Evidence of Hegemonic Masculinity*

The evidence of hegemonic masculinity in MKP-SA's activities and interactions between men includes overemphasis on rules, structure and protocol; militarism and an opaque hierarchy. Some men, and their female partners, also showed how they had internalized hegemonic masculinity in the way they dealt with challenges brought up by MKP-SA's activities.

Some respondents reported strong dissatisfaction with MKP-SA's over reliance on rigidity, rules protocol. Saul wrote on his questionnaire that he had left an existing I-Group because he found "some of the structured interactions and exercises too rigid or misapplying psychological principles. [There was] too much rigidity related to ... rigid protocols and errors in principles used." When asked what he would like to change about the group, Saul answered: "Men should be encouraged to use protocol merely as a guideline and allow for more natural, uninterrupted confrontation and free discussion of important subjects. I very much need a 'talking circle' with honesty and depth."

One example of such rigidity was timekeeping. Men were constantly reminded about the need for punctuality, that time was passing ("Men are waiting!" is one of the calls repeated often on the NWTA) and that they are accountable for being late. This continuous emphasis on timekeeping prevailed through all aspects of the organization. Many men rushed to attend meetings on time and called ahead if only five minutes late. I-Groups constantly checked on time, set, and referred to time limits for activities. In almost all I-Groups I observed, all the participants arrived on time to find a site prepared with seating, food and other equipment all pre-prepared.

This emphasis on timekeeping is linked to the organisation's beliefs around what members term "accountability" i.e. keeping one's word to oneself and to others. But the organization's very strong push on punctuality has its costs: Many men with whom I traveled to I-Group meetings were very stressed by their having to be on time. MKP-SA's unforgiving time management and organization ethos was not in line with the reality of the very busy lives of its members. It is harsh and unforgiving and thereby exacerbates the stress levels of men who already hold themselves to very high standards. This uncompromising harshness reflects a persistent hegemonic masculinity in the organization.

Indeed, some men said they had found some of the MKP-SA activities reminiscent of military service or apartheid-era imprisonment. Adam, who said that the NwTA assisted him to break the “logjam” in his life, also reported being shocked by the militarism of the activities: “I was shocked by the darkness, militarism. Other men also were irritated [repeated three times] at the militarism.” John, a man who had struggled with alcoholism, said that he had felt “degenerated” and “insulted” by some of the processes and reported “having flashbacks” from his time in the army. James, a black man who had no army conscription experience, reported that he and some others like him had been reminded by the NwTA activities of being in apartheid-era detention camps.

Another complaint, from some men was of an “**old boys’ club**” at play within MKP-SA, with an inner clique made up of founders and leaders.<sup>30</sup>

A strict **leadership hierarchy** was observed within MKP-SA. Leadership decisions, including timekeeping, were very tightly controlled by the Centre Director (CD), with almost no opposition. This was apparent at all the leadership meetings I attended, including the January 2005 Council Meeting, and again at the AGM. At the latter, no man opposed any of the elections for a new Council or even closely questioned the financials as presented (even though they were told that they could do so). Also apparent at the AGM was that members only spoke to the CD – even when addressing other members (i.e. they spoke through him).

#### *Internalized hegemonic masculinity*

Certain internalized patriarchal values influenced how MKP men dealt with each other and with others. Some men showed a desire to keep the activities of the group secret from other (non-MKP) men. Their apparent fear of revealing that one is engaged in psychotherapeutic work (further reflecting persistently hegemonic masculinity) was illustrated best by I-Group One, where a man reported that his wife had told him she was not comfortable with his hosting the I-

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<sup>30</sup> With the organization now five years older, many of the founders have moved on from leadership positions; however, the leadership style may be the same.

Group in their house for fear of neighbours finding out about their activities. He explained that he had compromised by telling the neighbours that they were working on a play about helping women with Aids. The following week, however, he told me that he had decided to call his neighbours and told them the truth about their activities (i.e. that it was a men's group), and was met by one woman neighbour saying she was surprised at the extent of the emotional connection of the men to each other (to which he replied: "You ain't seen nothing yet!").

The above case shows how an elite woman can internalize aspects of hegemonic masculinity to a greater extent than her husband i.e. she did not want neighbours to know of her husband's "problems" and life issues. It also shows how some men can, through participation in MKP-SA's activities, come to face the hegemonic masculinity that has entrapped them and then to open up to - and to take emotional risks with - another person or persons and engage in a conversation about men's feelings.

I found that all of my discussions with non-MKP men and women about the group, its activities and my research provided an opening to discuss men, their masculinity, their needs, and the challenges they experience in speaking about their emotions. They also opened opportunities to consider the role of such men's groups as MKP-SA: merely speaking about such men's groups seemed to create space to discuss gender, masculinity and relations between the genders – all positive developments for gender equality.

### ***Opportunities to Play Out Non-Hegemonic Masculinity***

Participation in MKP-SA activities gave men opportunity to play out non-hegemonic masculinity. Two examples were observed: domesticity and male to male physical affection. In the I-Groups men took great care in preparing the environment, including food and drinks, since they took turns to host meetings at their respective homes. Almost always, the host had prepared the seating arrangements and ritual objects sensitively, and had advised fellow participants

of the meeting date and venue – and the need for privacy - well in advance. Their opportunity to play host in this fashion gave men a chance to access parts of themselves that involve the more domestic (conventionally female) activities such as food preparation and meal setting. Indeed, it seemed that, for that reason, meal breaks were a significant part of many I-Group meetings where, despite severe time constraints because of MKP protocols, participants really enjoyed those breaks. Men often spoke with enthusiasm about the meal breaks and what food was prepared; some even cooked meals for their I-Group peers. Around the table conversation was light with many jokes and laughs – quite different from the seriousness of the meetings that had just ended.

I observed much male-to-male physical affection on the part of straight men in MKP-SA, including overt displays of affection (e.g. hugs, gazing into each other's eyes) at the start and end of I-Groups and other MKP-SA events. These included the Honouring Ceremony during which many participants and facilitators exchanged hugs (which were applauded by the watching men and women), kissed each others' hands and held hands.

This male-to-male physical affection on the part of straight men in MKP-SA is echoed by Haenfler (2004), who reported how members of the Straight Edge (sXe) men's group give each other big hugs to express their feelings of friendship towards each other and call each other "brother". Haenfler notes too that "although hardly a revolution in emotional expression, sXe did allow men to stretch beyond the confines of hegemonic masculinity" (2004, 83). Schwalbe (1996: 200) believes the more open physical affection displayed between straight men is due to the "deep masculinity" of the mythopoetic men's groups, as seen in the acceptance of bi and gay men. Whatever the reason, participation in the activities of MKP-SA enables elite, straight men the space to be overtly physically intimate and in doing so to break some traditional barriers to straight male-to-male intimacy.

### *Partners' Reported Effects of Activities on Men*

Female partners reported primarily positive effects of MKP-SA activities on their men. They said that the men were happier, more emotionally open and more confident. This finding is based only on what was said by spouses and partners of men who had recently completed the NwTA spoke at the Honouring Ceremony about changes they had witnessed in their men. Seven of them (of a total of 40) referred to the participants' "courage" and six expressed gratitude to the organization. Partners also commented that the men had returned "gentler", "emotionally expressive", "uplifted", "shining" and "happy".

Given that the Honouring Ceremony occurs a mere three days after a very powerful and inspirational training, it is unsurprising that participants were seen to be energized and perhaps even exuding confidence. A longer-term study would be needed to assess longer-term effects of the activity on men's emotional and psychological states – and how their partners report such. But partners were clear in their reports that participants had changed for the better – and that the changes permeated their primary relationships.

### **Summary of Findings**

While respondents reported that they had experienced different effects of MKP-SA's main activities, many men reported that they had experienced personal growth and learnt about masculinity and men, as well as gained an understanding of fathering and father-son relations. Some (mostly gay) respondents reported learning about their sexuality as a consequence of their involvement. Most respondents reported that despite having expected it, they did not increase their numbers of friendships or find a new community after participating. Similarly, most respondents reported that philanthropic and political activities were not important experiences of MKP-SA activities – with a minority expressing dissatisfaction that that was the case.

Most respondents reported improved capacity to self-assess their feelings and unthreateningly to express potentially destructive emotions, including anger. The latter has very positive implications for gender equity, given that much violence is perpetrated by men.

For many respondents, participation in MKP-SA activities lifted their sense of inertia vis-à-vis life purpose. Others commented on the positive effects of participation on impending fatherhood and on understanding their relationships with their fathers, as well as on their understanding of being a man. Finally, respondents felt that MKP-SA's activities had assisted them in strengthening their capacity and level of self-reflexivity.

While some of the data point to MKP-SA activities having the potential to improve gender equality, the minority of the data show the reverse. The data on sexuality show that straight men are not overly concerned with understanding their sexuality, are much more concerned with understanding relationships (with other men and with women), and, most importantly, that they separate sexuality and relationship – meaning that they do not see much of an influence of sexuality on relationships with opposite sex partners. That said, the data from gay respondents indicated that they both expected and got help with working out their sexual identity. Moreover, while some respondents reported having been rejected when they expressed themselves to the group – which could only exacerbate divisions amongst men, rather than achieve the organization's goal of unification – the majority reported having been made to feel welcome and safe in MKP-SA. Further, partners of men who had recently completed the NWTA reported that the men were more emotionally open, happy and confident – and that these changes were having a positive effect on their relationships.

In conclusion, the data indicate that the majority of respondents reported that one of the effects of MKP-SA activities on their relationships with self was that self-expression, including emotional openness and fathering / father-son relations, all

improved. As these are all key indicators of gender equality, these findings point to the likelihood that the activities of a mythopoetic men's group such as MKP-SA may well contribute to increasing the extent of gender equality.

The following chapter presents and examines the data on the effects of MKP-SA's activities on elite straight white men's relationships with others – of different race, class, gender and sexuality – and on their willingness to engage in pro-feminist work.

University of Cape Town

## **5. “INTEGRATING ONE MAN AT A TIME”: REPORTED EFFECTS OF ACTIVITY ON RESPONDENTS’ RELATIONS WITH OTHERS**

This chapter focuses on the effect of the activities of MKP-SA on elite white straight men’s relationships with others – women, poor men, black and coloured men and gay men. I also include findings on respondents’ stated objectives around pro-feminist work.

Data were obtained from questionnaire answers – specifically, respondents’ levels of socio-political activism before and after the NWTA, what socio-political activities (in the organisation’s parlance, “Action in the World”) respondents said they would like to have seen MKP-SA do more of. Data were also obtained from twelve interviews (eleven men plus one partner), as well as from participant observation at leadership meetings, five Integration Groups, social activities and meetings.

### **Effects of Activities on Elite Men’s Relations with Women**

The effects of MKP-SA activities reportedly improved the quality of elite men’s relationships with their primary female partners but may have negative effects on their view of women in general. Respondents reported that the activities had helped in their relationships with their female partners (including their handling of heterogeneous sexuality, as discussed in the previous chapter). Those men who had joined the organization whilst in a committed relationship stayed in that relationship, and many reported an improvement in the quality of their interaction in the relationship – particularly in the area of communication but also including respondents increasing material contributions (e.g. child raising). Some respondents reported actively incorporating what they had learned from MKP-SA activities into their relationships, and with positive effect, particularly in assisting them to express themselves more openly and honestly. However, a small minority said that involvement of women in the men’s group’s activities would be beneficial to both the men and their partners. The female partners of participants interviewed reported that the MKP-SA activities had helped their relationships

with their men and had helped the women themselves within those relationships, and had also helped the men themselves.

### *Reports of Effects of MKP-SA Activities on Participants' Relationships with Women*

None of the respondents reported that MKP-SA activities had had harmful effects on their primary relationships with women. Many reported positive effects. One of the main areas in which respondents felt that the activities had benefited those amongst their relationships was in communication. Most reported that they could, post NWTa, communicate with their partners more fully and honestly than previous to going on the NWTa. One man wrote that the activity helped him be “more straight” with women i.e. less dishonest with women. Another, Stephen – to whom I referred earlier as saying that he felt that doing the NWTa earlier in his life might have saved his marriage but who subsequently did in fact divorce – reported that participation in the NWTa had assisted him to communicate better with his past and current partners: “I’ve been able to be honest with my ex-wife about the marriage – I’m feeling okay to express my feelings. I’ve been able to be honest in my current relationship – there is no cheating.”

Solomon, the young Zulu respondent also cited earlier, reported that the activities had improved his relations with his wife. He said that post the activity he felt more emotionally accessible and able to compromise:

I have become more open in relationships. My relationship is better than before. My wife wasn’t happy that I was going to staff on the NWTa at the same time that she was going away. To her it was like I was choosing MKP over her, so I compromised by spending time on both.

Solomon also reported that his wife sees him as more loving than before the activity and that they had experienced significant changes in the quality of their sexual relationships and their relationship in general:

For me the relationship is more satisfying me. It was more fucking [before the activity]; now it’s more loving. I want to satisfy my partner. There is more feeling. The whole relationship has changed. She can see [these changes]

some times. I didn't know if I was going to pursue the relationship or not [at the time of the activity].

One respondent spoke of his father's passing away immediately before his doing the NWTAs, and of his having wanted to work on fathering issues, wrote on the questionnaire that one of the things he liked about MKP was its positive effect on his relations with women: "It has been very long and slow in coming but, after about three years, I see a positive impact on my relationships with women."

Again, these findings are similar to those of other studies. Richard (2000) found that respondents reported that their relationships with women had improved due to their having learned modes of self-analysis that prompted a clear, honest and respectful approach to relationships. He cited men referring to a "demystification" of women and of their having become less dependent on women to meet their emotional needs. (2000, 167). Similarly, Pentz (2000, 214) found that men in the MKP group that he studied reported "moving from needing women to just wanting their companionship" as well as an increased ability to share feelings.

*Partners' and Children's Reports of Effects of Activities on Primary Relationships*  
Partners and children of MKP-SA men were positive in their assessment of the activities on their relationships. They reported that their men had improved in the area of communication since the activities, which, in turn, allowed for the partners to gain a more secure sense of self and relationship basis.

Jill, the wife of Bill, who reported how the NWTAs helped him with impending fatherhood, was interviewed about changes she has seen in her husband since the activity. She responded that the activity had helped improve Bill – but added that he had a baseline of emotional intelligence to begin with:

MKP's taken who he was and made him better. What was there was great. [The change] wasn't as dramatic as with other men. It's EI (Emotional Intelligence). Bill was EI to start off with. He could identify emotions and talk about them. Bill has grown up emotionally. He has become self-sufficient. He used to get upset and shut me out. Now he's able to articulate what it is. Then I know that it's not me.

Another man's wife reported that "communication is clearer" since he did the NWTa. Comments used by more than one partner of men who had returned from the NWTa at the Honouring Ceremony included: "We have a better connection in the relationship"; his participation in the NWTa has "healed our relationship"; and the activity has "made our home safe". One woman said, referring to MKP-SA's Multicultural and Diversity Team (its arm dedicated to diversity in the organisation): "You make me feel safe." And one daughter commented that her father – a veteran in the organization – was "a much better dad" than before (his doing the NWTa).

MKP-SA's activities are not panaceas in and of themselves, however. Jill, whom we met above as Bill's wife, commented on a friend's relationship, after the friend's man had completed the NWTa, that: "For Simon, he hasn't done his work. I know they have problems in their marriage. He never talks of his feelings."

#### *Effect of Activities on Relationship Longevity*

I asked respondents on the questionnaire to list their marital status ("single", "married", "separated", "divorced", "widowed") at the time of the NWTa and at the time of returning the questionnaire. Only one out of 19 respondents replied a change in status – and that was from a gay man who described himself (both at the time of the NWTa and at the time of returning the questionnaire) as being in a "serious relationship with a man, thus not dating and not married". None of the 13 men who described themselves as married at the time of the activity listed themselves as anything else at the time of filling in the questionnaire (this time period between the activity and the returning of the questionnaire varied between respondents from between one to five years). The activities of the MKP-SA did not seem to affect these respondents' relationship longevity negatively over the long-term.

### *Incorporation of Things learned in Men's Group into their Primary Relationships*

Some respondents reported that they had actually incorporated some of the psychotherapeutic processes, emotional literacy technologies and rituals from the MKP-SA activities into their primary relationships. One man from I-Group One reported that he had incorporated some of the rituals and visioning exercises from the MKP-SA's training into the relationship with the woman he was dating. Another man, from I-Group Three, told me that he used the "clearing" protocol (a psychotherapeutic process designed to help a man who has issues with another person to understand what lies underneath his anger) successfully with his wife.

### *Inclusion of Women in Men's Group Activities*

The men of the MKP-SA expressed desires to both include and exclude women from their activities. Noting that most of these women were their primary partners, interesting questions around integration of their MKP-SA practices with their general lives for the individual men arise (discussed in more detail in Conclusion).

Certain respondents indicated that they would prefer more inclusion of women in the group in its psychotherapeutic activities. For example, when asked "What do you dislike – and would like to change – about MKP-SA?" One man who was living with the same partner as when he did the NWTAs three years ago, responded, "The lack of risk regarding occasional inclusion of women in the work." While couched in post-Jungian language ("lack of risk", "work"), it is clear that this respondent would like to see women included in the psychotherapeutic activities of the men's mythopoetic group. This theme was echoed by another man, who felt that women could be included in some of the activities: "There should also be some kind of activities for men and women, perhaps *Head, Heart and Soul*".

Some respondents felt that women should be included in the MKP-SA's social activities. When asked as to what other activities he thought MKP-SA should put on, one replied: "I feel that within the I-Groups there should be more social

interaction that includes the whole family so that the 'MKP widows' can see who their partner is mixing with." Another man said that he would like to see families involved in social activities.

And there is evidence that the female partners of the MKP-SA men would indeed like to be active in some of their activities. Jill reported that she feels left out of the organization at times: "I wish they brought women into MKP. I'd like to get involved." Some partners of men told me that they were alarmed that decisions affecting their relationships were discussed by their partner men in I-Groups but not at home with them.

Some men of the MKP-SA also actively excluded women from organizational activities. At the 2005 Annual General Meeting, for example, one of the leaders told another man to not allow the women present to listen to the organization's business. Some of the respondents expressed a desire to keep their partners excluded from the men's group because they preferred to "separate their business and personal lives". When speaking of his I-Group's Christmas dinner, for example, Jack expressed his discomfort at introducing his wife to the men in his I-Group for fear of blurring this line.

From the above comments, some of the men of the MKP-SA clearly practice escapist forms of male bonding. Haenfler notes (2004:87) that escape into exclusively male groups is one of the responses by contemporary men to the so-called "crisis in masculinity" and perceived "feminization" of men in greater society. "Such exclusive social settings served to resist the feminization of men by women and became refuges from the fiercely competitive and alienating workplace." The men of the MKP-SA consistently said in interviews that being with other men (to the exclusion of women) allowed them to be vulnerable and open up. The subtext is that "male intimacy would be threatened by the integration of women" (Kimmel 1996, 311, quoted in Kaener 2004, 91).

### *Negative Effects of Activities on Men's Views towards Women*

Notwithstanding the emotional openness and better personal health reported above, some of the activities have negative effects on men's views towards women.

John, one of the men who struggled with alcoholism, said this about the activities' effects on his views on women:

[The activities have] made me aware that I give lots of power away to women; that doesn't mean I change my behaviour. I only recently started practicing changing that. This awareness came from MKP. I wasn't aware before. I give women too much credit for everything. Sometimes I can't think rationally because they're pretty! I listen too much to women. I give them too much credit – like the Gospel. I trust women more, because women can't be cruel. Women are soft and nurturing. I still believe that.

Though John believes that the MKP-SA assisted him understand the power relations between men and women, this understanding problematises taking advice from and trusting women, listening to women and leaves him devoid of taking any responsibility for his own actions and beliefs.

When I discussed some of my initial conclusions – in particular, the one that notes that the men of the MKP-SA need do more pro-feminist work – with one of the longer serving members of the organisation, I was told that I was apologizing for women and that “women must take care of themselves”. This man described himself as an “anti-feminist”. Schwalbe (1996:189) found similar occurrences of men “guilt tripping” other members of the mythopoetic group who are concerned with feminism and accusing them (in real psychological post-Jungian discourse) as being “in denial” about their own masculinity.

Some of MKP-SA's activities are androcentric. For example, the lineage invoked by participants is only that of the father (“I am Stuart, son of [father]”). This process again effectively excludes one entire gender (and ancestry, history). As Schwalbe (1996:193) astutely observes, this “focus on men ... belittles women's problems (it's as if they do not exist)”. Schwalbe believes that a result of this sole

focus on the male is better relations for participants with fathers but not with mothers, and the refusal of men to deal with issues of women (such as prenatal care, feminization of poverty, reproductive freedom), as shown below.

### *Mixed Findings*

While the MKP-SA's activities seem to have helped elite men's relationships with their primary partners, they also seem to have some imbued very problematic gender typecasting of women and have discouraged the participants from doing pro-feminist work. These mixed findings are borne out by other studies.

Mankowski et al (2000, 189) found not much change in the men's attitudes towards women: respondents reported wanting to see more women in positions of leadership, were less bothered by women's presence and agreed with the statement that men can be assertive with women. He concluded that the findings are not conclusive ("at present they seem contradictory and initial") and that a more broad study is needed to examine effects of activities on men's attitudes towards women (ibid.).

### **Effects of Activities on Elite Men's Relations with Men of Other Classes**

While some of the respondents reported wanting to expand the reach of the MKP-SA's trainings to poor men – and none opposed the organization reaching out to poor men – the activities did not have much positive effect on elite men's relations with men of other classes. In fact, next to race (see below and not surprisingly as in South Africa the two are highly overlapping) class was very divisive between the men of the MKP-SA. Class issues were seen in affordability, digital divisions and literacy rates.

### *Financial Divides*

As noted above, the activities of the MKP-SA are very expensive, with the NWTAs – still the sole means for membership in the organization - the most extreme case in point. Poor men reported being extremely frustrated at the organisation's lack of financial and employment assistance, this leading to them questioning the

nature of the “brotherhood” and “community” ethos espoused by the MKP-SA.

For example, James said in his interview:

The other thing is financials: why do I have to write bursary motivations? I always have to come up with reasons I need a bursary. One guy suggested photocopying and changing dates [on the application forms]! I don't need to be reminded I have big problems. I'm not being trusted.

When asked as to what the organization can do for him, James replied: Boost the energy of black people in this...spiritually, there is a need for MKP to be more involved in the black community because there are problems [in the black community]. There is a need for interaction with black people. MKP can reach out at grassroots level.

Adam, the middle class man who felt MKP-SA had helped him “clear the logjam”, also spoke of the divisiveness of class issues with specific reference to lower-middle class men, a category that is often ignored by leadership when dispensing bursaries in favour of the poorest:

It is easier for men to give full scholarships [for the Nweta] than partial ones, and easier to accept full than partial scholarships. Wealthy guys have a harder time accepting partial scholarships. The taxi fare for Embizweni [NGO in Khayelitsha – see below] is an easy one, but some guy in Goodwood what has R20 petrol fare is a much harder one. Money is a hard one [issue]. As Andries [du Toit, then Centre Director] pointed out, as soon as money is mentioned, there's a tension.

Adam also revealed that there were money issues not just between poor and wealthy men but also between middle class men: “Some men can afford to fly down from Joburg [to facilitate]. For some men that's easy, for others it's too much money.”

Clearly, financial divisions – between the very wealthy and the very poor and among the middle class men – exist and they are affecting men's participation levels, feelings towards the men's group and its values. Black men reported not being able to participate fully in the MKP-SA's activities due to not having any or ready access to email.

### *Respondents' Criticisms of Organisation's Lack of Class Consciousness*

Some of the respondents were sensitive to the issues of class and the divisions

within the men's group. One, who was actively involved in community work volunteering to help men in the throes of terminal illness, criticised the MKP-SA for being both classist and racist: "The cost of the Nwta favours the affluent and those with nothing. There is little chance for most in between. I wonder why there are so few - maybe no - middle to upper class black men. Something is missing in this area."

George, the recovered alcoholic, was similarly scathing of his criticism of the men's group as being classist, homophobic and racist:

[MKP-SA is] a bourgeois white men's club, heedless of the privilege of its members, racially polarised between rich, white men and poor, black men. [It] believes that by saying "we are all men" it can paper over all the schisms and fault lines that exist in the organisation. It is deeply and subliminally homophobic. The present ring fenced, impermeable I-Group structure reinforces divisions and creates a culture of the "old boys in 'mature' I groups" versus the "new arrivals". It is a polarising and divisive mindset and structure. MKP-SA is exclusivist.

Poor and less wealthy members of the MKP-SA do not have sufficient finances or technology access to participate fully in its activities. There may also be language barriers, particularly as many black men are English as Second Language speakers, and the protocols are written in American English. Some members are aware and highly critical of these divisions of class (often seen as race) but very few offer concrete, measurable solutions. This results in frustration and distrust.

### **Effects of Activities on Elite Men's Relations with Men of Other Races**

There is a huge gap between the lives of poor black and white members of the MKP-SA, and this manifests in health, financial situation, stresses and challenges. As with class, race was a very strong divider of the MKP-SA, and the activities did not prove to have much positive or constructive effect on improving race relations within the organization. In fact, the majority of black respondents (as did many white respondents), complained of racism within the organization, and both groups of men spoke of the need to resolve these issues taking into account South Africa's history. And while many elite men called for greater diversity within the organization (including by race), not many had concrete ideas

on how to realize this objective; this ability was often affected by the mythopoetic line of thinking.

### *Race as a Divider in the Men's Group*

Black men account for approximately 15% of total membership of the MKP-SA, the majority of whom are poor (some are students and a few middle class men have joined the organization).<sup>31</sup>

Race – and the behaviours attached to them - was a very strong divider in the MKP-SA, causing a lot of distrust and frustration – especially for black men – and threatening the nature of “the brotherhood.” An example of this was seen when the Centre Director (CD - a white, middle class man) met with the leaders of Embizweni, the NGO which acts as a feeder of black men (always on scholarship) into the NWTa, while their computer and printers were being fixed. The CD took this opportunity to meet with the men, who were the senior black facilitators in the MKP-SA at that time.<sup>32</sup> After handshakes and drinks (non-alcoholic), chips and cigarettes were purchased by the CD, the men got down to the business at hand. Two of the most senior black men, one of whom was James, expressed their nervousness at the meeting. Eyes were cast down and hands were wrung.

The meeting focused on two issues: Alcohol abuse and financial support. The first issue was raised by the CD, who complained that some of the men referred by the NGO arrived drunk at the NWTa and at the Honouring Ceremony. This, he said, “played up to white men’s stereotypes of black men.” He then admitted his own challenges with alcohol. The black men, two of whom smelled of alcohol at the meeting, provided reasons - including that they cannot control how much men drink, the fact that some men drink the night before or have a few drinks but are still smelling of alcohol at the time of the NWTa and that some men attend rituals

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<sup>31</sup> MKP-SA membership list

<sup>32</sup> Two middle class coloured men have been fast-tracked into leadership positions with financial assistance from the organisation. Pers. Comm., Centre Director, Nov 2010.

where they must drink. The leader of the group said that he has to drink with the local men in order to earn their trust.

It would appear that the strict no alcohol policy of the MKP-SA is more difficult for black men to adhere to. This may be due to drinking being part of hegemonic masculinity in the townships. Some of the elite men of the MKP-SA at the first Council meeting said – in direct reference to alcohol abuse of black men - that they want to be more selective in their choosing of scholarship applicants (as opposed to merely accepting any man because they are black and poor). These discussions continue in the organization without any clear solutions or guidelines.

The other area of contention – this time raised by black men - was financial. According to the CD, certain members of Embizweni asked for loans from the MKP-SA – both individually and as an organization. In response, the head of the NGO appeared angry and said that he did not know who had asked for money but will find out. He did not say what the follow-up would entail. But he went on to say that he would never ask a white man to borrow money again. Admitting that he may just be bitter due to apartheid, he said he did not “want to beg”. He questioned the MKP-SA’s idea of “brotherhood” and reminded the CD that they all worked at Embizweni as volunteers. James commented: “The whites only built one entrance to our homes so that they could catch the *kaffirs* easily.”

Another black man at the meeting said that he had indeed asked for a personal loan from the men’s group - to cover his brother’s funeral (his brother sold sweets on the trains). After repeated calls, his request was refused. The CD said he did not want to be perceived as a “white ATM”, but as an individual. He also said that he sees the risk of exploitation in the lending of money but also apologized if he was being racist.

James also spoke of his desire for the organization to offer employment assistance.

We should be able to use the community resources. Refer employment to us! Quite a lot of [black] MKP guys are unemployed. Networking has not yet been done. This was voiced to Council in October 2004. It promised to do networking in terms of looking for skills.

He reminded the CD that the Council had promised to establish a database of members for employment, but that nothing had been done to date. As at October 2010, this networking had still not been done. There was one email that came out in that month on the list-serve that called for men to help a start-up project in the townships of non-MKP men.

It is clear that the poor black men of the MKP-SA are struggling financially, with unemployment and with alcohol abuse, and expect membership in the men's group to improve their lives in a very real material sense – and that the organization is not meeting these expectations. The more the elite white members (in true mythopoetic form) psychologize the problem (e.g. the CD said that talking “man to man in open communication” will “bridge the gaps”) without providing concrete assistance, the more black members will continue to feel aggrieved.

#### *Black Men's Experiences of Discrimination*

Some black respondents were critical of the discrimination they faced at the hands of the elite men of the MKP-SA. They distinguished between the activities – many of which were seen as positive, or at least, discrimination-neutral – and the white men. For example, James was praiseworthy of the NWTA, saying that it “developed me in terms of cultural issues. I learned that it's all right to share.” But he also spoke of racism in the organization:

I'm referred to as the 'Khayelitsha man'. We [white members and black members] don't talk on equal terms. There is dominance by other parties in the organization so that we do not reach multicultural issues. We have not reached the level where we can say: 'We are men – we are totally together.'

When asked when or how he will know when he has reached that level, James responded:

It is very, very, very, very much sharing like [mentions the example above with the CD] coming to Khayelitsha or me going to Constantia. When we start

interacting as *men* [emphasis his].

Clearly there is still a lot of anger from the black men of the MKP-SA directed at white members around racism. This is also the case with coloured members. On one NWTAs, a coloured facilitator expressed his desire to “clear” with all the white facilitators men present. He was angry about the racism he had endured under apartheid and accused the white men of not being genuinely contrite.

### *White Men's Experiences of Discrimination*

But it is not only the black and coloured men of the MKP-SA who are suffering due to the divisive nature of racial conflict in the organization: white men are also being affected negatively. After the above “clearing” process, Johan, the Afrikaans respondent who had spent some time in the military, told me that he had felt ashamed and disempowered by the process – that he had received all the blame and had not been able to speak in return.

Race is very much in your face [in the MKP-SA]. One of the men of colour did a process with me about race. I felt alienated, withdrawn and distant. But I felt acknowledged by the other [white] men. Black people do not see the gold in white people. All I see is anger in black South Africans.

As with the discussions about women's issues above, Johan's comments reveal the way in which the men of the MKP-SA psychologise racial issues, using post-Jungian language (e.g. “gold”) to speak of structural issues.

Other elite men reported that “there are different rules for Xhosa men, that black men can staff [facilitate the NWTAs] without I Group initiation being completed”; which, they felt, was “disempowering” (they did not specify how or to whom).

Issues of race, especially when handled insensitively, affect white, coloured and black men of the MKP-SA negatively and are very much still a part of the men's group.

### *Racism in Practice in the Organisation*

Racism was observed in practice in the MKP-SA. In the Council meeting of January 27 2005, only one black man, a middle-class man from Johannesburg, spoke for the first hour and a half (of the 15 men present, three were black or coloured). When he did speak, he was interrupted twice by white men.

### *Social Separation by Race in the Organisation*

There was very little socializing across racial lines in the MKP-SA. At the picnic following the AGM, there was no communication between black and white men and their families. In fact, both sat on separate sides of the outdoor area. Food became communal, though. Similarly, at the Honouring Ceremony, the three black men who attended the event sat on their own during the socializing time. They did not have any family support; there were no black women or children at the event.

### *Cultural Divisions*

Some racial divisions are due not to overt racism but to differences in cultures between the white / American predominant culture of the MKP-SA and the Xhosa culture. Black respondents reported having issues with some of the rituals of the Nwata, particularly with the timing of the men's group "initiation" with regard to Xhosa initiation:

I have no problem with being naked, but MKP is not seen as black culture – boys under eighteen are not part of initiation school. Boys [males i.e. uninitiated in Xhosa culture, regardless of age] should first go to Xhosa initiation before MKP. Otherwise, boys will see circumcised men – and that is a problem. How can he [the boy] look at my penis? He's not reached this stage.

James reported when some of the black men on the training complained to him about going naked in front of uninitiated "boys", he replied that he had gotten permission (from the ancestors) to allow this. Clearly, however, there is at least one area on the activity that is making Xhosa men uncomfortable.

### *Black Men's Reported Benefits of Participation*

Some black and coloured men reported benefiting from participation in the MKP-SA's activities. One such report came from the Father-Son hike, where the only black man (out of 14) spent quite a bit of time on his own and did not complete the hike; however, he interacted with the children happily, and later said that he came on the hike to "avoid doing harmful things" at home in his girlfriend's absence.

Solomon found that the activity helped him to become aware of his difficulties with race and to face them in a positive way:

Being alone [on the NWTA] with men was scary. I was scared of white people but at the time I didn't know I had issues with race. On the NWTA, it was strange to see so many white people. It was a wake-up call for me that I was looking at colour and not at the person. On the NWTA I came out as a different man, quite comfortable around people, judging individuals not according to race.

Solomon said that on arrival on the NWTA he would have preferred more black men on staff and as fellow "initiates" but that after some time he felt comfortable. For him, the activities helped him work through race issues – and this continued to it being a non-issue in further activities. When asked of how race affected his I-Group experience, he replied: "I've never thought about it. Race is not an issue. It's never crossed my mind. I worked on that on the NWTA." Later in the interview, Solomon reported that the activity assisted him to want to work on repairing racial relations:

When things aren't going well, we always blamed whites or the [apartheid] system. On the NWTA I thought: 'Why not teach my friends to be more individual, to forget the past?' I have been able to do that: I try not to focus on someone as individual when they start to criticize on the racial thing.

Thus the activities had some very positive effects on black men, too.

### *Race Overcoming Masculinity as a Point of Reference*

There are points where race is more of a salient point of reference than gender in the men's group. Adam, the man who reported that the activity assisted him to break the "logjam" in his life, reported that race (and class) issues became divisive in his I-Group:

Four out of seven of my original group dropped out. Of the three remainers, one of them, a young black man, was often late and non-committal. Wandile [not his real name] didn't give any reasons. He said that he wasn't connecting to the issues of men in the group.

Adam went on to posit that Wandile's dropping out was due to the other two men being older and white. He went on to reveal a genuine desire to make a connection with men of other races and a respect for the black man's leadership qualities:

I'm sorry Wandile didn't stick around – he was a real leader. Both he and Innocent [another black man from the original seven; also not real name] had wisdom; they'd been through a tough life and had developed shields.

This desire on the part of elite white men of the MKP-SA to make contact with men of other races was also reported by many other respondents.

### *Responses of Organization's Leadership to Race Issues*

The leadership of the MKP-SA is aware of the racial issues but only in a limited way – i.e. the need for them to expand the socio-demographics of the men's group to better reflect the country's demographics. The leadership is not really aware of the differences in culture, class and practice and their impacts on black men in the activities. In the Council meeting just one month before the meeting with the members of Embizweni, in which no members of Johannesburg or the Khayelitsha community were present, a new membership strategy was mooted, one that recognized a "racially polarized community" that was "doomed to irrelevancy the national consensus: a bourgeois, white men's club" that needs to "expose men to what goes on in the world." Council members also spoke of the need to widen the advertising strategy for the Nweta and other activities, away from only word of mouth as "I only speak to other rich, white men." The leaders of the MKP-SA want to expand the demographics of the organization in an active

way. But some spoke of wanting to do so in a way that did not encumber them with targeting a single (i.e. black) racial group: “It is comforting to know that white men have black friends who are financially stable. In that way they can say ‘I want you as a friend’”.

To date, very few middle class black men have completed the NWTA. The organization hopes that with the running of the activity in Johannesburg more of this demographic will become part of the organization.

#### *Elite Men’s Discomfort with Organization’s Lack of Diversity*

Many respondents were critical of the MKP-SA’s lack of diversity and called for a much greater opening up of membership diversity. Edward, the gay respondent so critical of the MKP-SA, wrote in the questionnaire that the Multicultural and Diversity Training is only for “black and white issues. There are no gay, class or Indian issues.” He also said that, “the MKP culture doesn’t shift to help Xhosa culture. It only accommodates Xhosa culture.”

One man wrote on the questionnaire of wanting more diversity in the men’s group, including of race, language and religion, and profession in the men’s group:

I dislike the lack of emotionally literate people of other cultural groups than WASP. I dislike the lack of tribal people in MKP. I would like to bring culturally diverse people into MKP. I would like to bring more awareness of craftsmanship to MKP.

And George wrote that he would like to see a similarly heterogeneous men’s group where men could use the opportunity to truly empathize with different men’s experiences:

[I’d like to see an MKP-SA that is...] aware of the heterogeneous nature of its members, determined to make the MKP work nationally relevant by making it truly accessible to men of different classes, races etc...where new men are truly welcomed by the old. Where men become aware of what it is for other men who are unlike them to wake up every day with the thought that they are different

Stephen saw it as impossible for the North American protocols written for middle class men of MKP-SA to be used to assist poor black men in South Africa:

You and I are Jewish, 30-something whites. We are not going to be major players [in shaping South African society]. We're not going to connect with men in Lavender Hill [a poor area outside Cape Town]. We don't speak the same language as him, don't have the same point of identity. But that's where the work needs to take place.

Stephen saw an opportunity for the MKP-SA to “go large” – to obtain government funding to take activities to poor areas – as the way to make the organization relevant for a post-apartheid South Africa.

Adam, the man who reported that participation in the MKP-SA's NWTAs helped “clear his logjam”, said in his interview that crossovers (interaction between men of different races) are not happening in the men's group because of lack of social contact between white and black men, and then gave a solution:

Crossovers aren't happening because there aren't many men [in the MKP] that are not white, except for the 'Khayelitsha ghetto' – it is a problem. I better start making it happen if I think it's important. But I don't know where to find even one man from personal contact, especially in Cape Town, more so than in Johannesburg, people are still divided by suburbs. I don't meet people that are not white in the places that I go to. That means I must go to places where I can meet them [suggests 'maybe that means joining something'.]

While Adam reports that the elite men of the MKP-SA have little personal interaction with black men, he also notes that they have ways and means to approach this if they are willing. And the white men of the MKP-SA consistently speak about the need for inclusion, even to the point of overshadowing their traditional resistance to “feeling guilty”; however, similar with their Northern counterparts, much of it is lip service – they are as “stumped for ideas” or blame language or their not knowing men of similar class serves as obstacles to integration (Schwalbe 1996: 206).

### *Elite Men's Personal Solutions to Race and Class Divisions*

As shown above, on a personal level many of the elite men of the MKP-SA recognise huge disparities in class by race and wish to make some sort of intervention in this regard. In fact, many of the respondents saw expanding the socio-demographics of the MKP-SA (specifically in terms of class and race) as essential to the survival and relevance of the men's group. But they also saw those activities as only possible through the current structures and ethos of the men's group; in other words, the current training programmes, ethos and methodology of the MKP-SA had to remain intact – whatever the changes.

But many of the elite men psychologized the path to diversity in post-Jungian language. This view is epitomised in comments made by Adam in his interview. When asked what changes in the organization he would like to see, he replied: “The next step is to change the world. But MKP will *always* struggle with changing the world, especially in South Africa because of its demographics [emphasis his].”

When asked what the solution to South African society changing is, he replied: Just being conscious...Some issues do start from my consciousness, and accepting my struggle with other men. At the moment this struggle is with light-skinned men. Hopefully it will be with dark-skinned men in the future. At the moment this is not happening – which is a pity. Bridges have been made with other men, but there are no crossovers in MKP.

Adam believes that he is in a “struggle” with other men and that by “just being conscious” South African society will heal – across racial and class divides. Mark, a psychotherapist, saw no irony in stating on the questionnaire that he saw the men's group mission statement as “integrating the diverse people of this country, by integrating ‘one man at a time’”.

#### *Elite Men's Comfort with Organization's Lack of Diversity*

Some respondents were adamant that the MKP-SA should rather remain the conclave of elite men. They saw the men's group as quintessentially for elite white, straight men – by design and by definition.

Edward seemed to contradict himself (above) when he says in his interview:

MKP is misguided in that it thinks it can be all things at all times to all people. MKP is unaware of its limitations and refuses to acknowledge that it is limited. MKP is not appropriate to a man who does not have access to email or to a man who does not have access to English or to deaf men or to disabled men. Part of the power of MKP lies in the clear boundaries it maintains. To want to adjust MKP is wrong. A Xhosa MKP is not MKP. A Xhosa man can experience MKP but it is not that culture. It becomes something different if it becomes that culture.

When asked what the culture of MKP is, he replied:

Educating men about emotions. Accountability, responsibility and missions. Welcoming emotional experiences and traumas and offering opportunity to process these. This will translate into different realities in different cultures. A rainbow MKP is not MKP – not less but different. If men do not want to be part of MKP as it is, they should be honoured and not to be seen as something has failed because they're not sticking to it.

It is ironic that a gay man is saying that the MKP-SA (from which he withdrew participation after a good three to four years of much active participation including facilitation) need not adjust itself to cater for men of different cultures, abilities and classes. He may just be voicing the politically incorrect feelings which elite straight men feel they cannot voice.

### **Effects of Activities on Elite Men's Relations with Gay Men**

The activities of the MKP-SA were not found to have any significant effect on elite men's relations with gay men. There were instances of homophobia in the men's group, as well as discomfort with dealing with gay sexuality issues. Some straight respondents reported increased levels of comfort with gay men. The strongest finding by far was that gay respondents reported significantly higher levels of acceptance of their definitions of masculinity - directly due to the activities of the MKP-SA.

### *Reported Effects of Activity on Straight Respondents' Views on Gay Men*

Some straight respondents reported the activity had positive effects on the way they saw gay men. For example, Solomon, the young Zulu man, reported in his interview:

I'd never heard of gay men when growing up. I'd heard of gay men in Cape Town through work colleagues. Now [after the NWTAs] I trust someone [gay] as normal. I used to criticize gay men. Now I'm more comfortable – he's got his own rights.

For Solomon, at least, the activities had very positive effects on his views of the rights of gay men. Nakedness among men was practiced and seen as okay in the MKP-SA's activities: the men of the Father-Son Hike, for example, all swam naked without any comment.

Some of the respondents reacted positively to gay men due to the activity but retained some of their prejudices. Jack, the respondent who said that he wanted to make male friends, said in his interview:

In terms of homosexuality, I'm pretty liberal. I got close contact with masculine homosexuals - those that are not overtly camp, who don't act like they are gay. That was an eye opener for me and a positive experience. George doesn't act gay. I can relate to George completely – it has nothing to do with his homosexuality. Other men I know of are camp.

#### *Evidence of Homophobia in Men's Group Activities*

Homophobia was observed in certain of the MKP-SA's activities. In one exercise in I-Group Three (a reenactment of a straight man being raped in boarding school), two men laughingly refused to play the transgressors for fear of being labeled "gay".<sup>33</sup>

Edward reported in his interview that he had been told by the MKP-SA leaders that there was no need for gay men to be chosen as facilitators on the NWTAs except for the one process to do with sexuality. At the Honouring Ceremony a homophobic joke was made ("This is my brother, not my lover!"), which no-one opposed.

#### **Effects of Activities on Elite Men's Willingness to engage in Pro-Feminist Work**

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<sup>33</sup> The reenactment did eventually take place with the help of other men and it reportedly helped the man deal with his reported shame at having been raped.

Judging by the leadership decisions and by what the men's group does on a group level, the activities of the MKP-SA had little effect on respondents' willingness to engage in pro-feminist work. Many respondents reported very high rates of reticence or outright refusal to participate in socio-political activism. This was in part due to the mythopoetic belief that doing the personal work first will eventually influence the political. As with race and class issues, some respondents psychologized pro-feminist work. Those respondents who did want to do engage in pro-feminist work provided many different examples of how the MKP-SA could get involved. Some criticized the men's group for not being more active, and some elite men reported that the activities had in fact increased their levels of participation in pro-feminist work.

#### *Leadership and Group Level Attitudes towards Pro-feminist Work*

There is very little time or attention spent in any of the MKP-SA's activities on socio-political activism. Most respondents responded on the questionnaire that they were not members of social upliftment organizations (question twenty-one). I did not hear any proposals or discussion in the Council meetings about pro-feminist work or activities, nor did I see any proposals or discussion in any of the five I-Groups I observed.

In fact, at the 2005 AGM no man volunteered or was nominated for the organization's Action in the World portfolio, and the leadership left it unfilled (all other posts were filled). Earlier in the meeting, MKP-SA had awarded its annual Action in the World award to a group that is trying to deal with the consequences of South African male violence and memory.

One respondent criticized the leadership of the MKP-SA for actively blocking social upliftment work:

Council refused a donation for work on HIV/Aids. This felt petty and bureaucratic. This could have been used as a gesture to say 'We're an organization that lives in a country that is seriously affected by Aids and this is our contribution.' It was not about the money.

### *Separation of the Personal and the Political*

Some of the respondents reported no need for them to do social upliftment work as they separated the personal (the inner, spiritual elements) from the political (exterior, worldly affairs). This was perhaps best personified by one respondent, who wrote on the questionnaire in response to question forty-two (“What ‘Action in the World’ or social upliftment activities would you like to see MKP-SA put on?”): “changing people’s internal attitudes in spite of their external situations.” One man, a psychotherapist, saw no irony in stating that he saw the men’s group mission statement as “integrating the diverse people of this country, by integrating one man at a time”.

### *Respondents’ Reported Choices for Pro-Feminist Work*

When replying to the question, “What ‘Action in the World’ or social upliftment activities would you like to see MKP-SA put on?” some of the suggestions for pro-feminist work involved working with men, and many had to do with reducing violence perpetrated by men and modeling positive behaviour.

Suggestions included talking circles in previously disadvantaged communities. George spoke of fostering “polycultural awareness” and training to the SAPS and the SANDF and another man wanted to see MKP-SA involved in “men against women and child abuse”. Two respondents suggested working with men in prisons (MKP-USA runs support programmes for men in prisons), while others suggested helping to uplift men and boys self esteem in impoverished areas. One respondent said that he would like to see MKP-SA involved in “gangland work” – “anything that provides contact or the right modeling to men who most need it and those who themselves would be most effective in this work in their worlds.” Another felt that education and creating awareness in the area of violent

men's behaviour was a valid avenue of pro-feminist work for the men of the MKP-SA.

#### *Reported Positive Effects of Activities on Willingness to do Pro-Feminist Work*

Some respondents reported that the activities of the MKP-SA encouraged them to become more active in pro-feminist work. In order to ascertain the effects of the activity on respondents' levels of pro-feminist work, I asked them to list their involvement in other organizations before joining the MKP (question twenty) and currently (question twenty-one). George, the older gay man who said he found a sense of his masculinity in MKP-SA, was one such example. Prior to the NWT, he only attended self-help (addiction) groups. Post the activity, he was very involved in gay rights activism, community policing forums and the men's group leadership itself. Another said that he participated more in community work since going on the activity. Post the NWT, he had personally established two forums (although both of which, it must be said, had direct benefits to his career and to his children's education).

One man reported that participation in the MKP-SA helped him do more community service: "I am getting the support and encouragement to find my role in community service - where in the past I might have felt kind of embarrassed to be doing it (as in people think I am stupid to be giving away my energy for free)."

For some elite men, the activities proved a support and springboard for them to increase their levels of pro-feminist work.

#### *High Reticence / Resistance to Getting Involved in MKP-SA Leadership*

Reticence to be involved in social activism through the men's group was also evident in the low turnout for the Annual General meeting. When I asked men from I-Group One why they had not attended, two replied that family time was more important to them on a Saturday afternoon. Most of the men who take up leadership positions in the MKP-SA are either single, retired or are not parents; time is a factor that prohibits members from participating in the organization's

leadership structures. But other men said that they did not want to feel guilty or obliged (“It [MKP-SA] would become a cult or a religion”). As Schwalbe notes (1996: 189), the men in mythopoetic men’s groups avoid guilt at all costs – not just with others but with other elite men. Others simply said that they were not interested in the politics of the MKP-SA.

### *Conclusion*

While some respondents are not interested in becoming involved in pro-feminist work at all, and the mythopoetic philosophies are at times responsible for their reticence, others reported wanting to increase their participation levels, especially in the area of assisting men with violence. As Schwalbe (1996: 237) notes, individuation trumps activism. The question is whether individuation also leads to activism. My findings show that at least some respondents have become more involved in community upliftment since the activities and as a direct result of the activities of the MKP-SA.

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## 6. CONCLUSION

MKP-SA is a small, local organization which does not aspire to recruit or mobilize men on a large scale. In a way, it is a business rather than a men's social movement understood as the 'organised responses' of men (Messner 1997, 11). Nevertheless, its approach is purposeful, located in a particular reading of gender politics and specifically responsive to the expressed need by elite men for some outlet to explore issues relating to their own masculinities (as well as life issues such as relationships and purpose). This thesis has sought to assess the impact of the organization on some of its members, particularly on gender equality. It has examined the group's responses to key social issues such as racial and class inclusivity and its stance on homophobia and it has been particularly interested in examining the impact of the organization's activities on those men who participated.

In this thesis I have tried to distinguish between the various types of gendered impact that MKP-SA had on participants by introducing the concepts of gendered equity and equality. I have used these to assess where MKP-SA can be located in the context of gendered politics in South Africa. As described in Chapter One, much of the pro-feminist literature has found organizations such as MKP-SA to be at the end of a continuum i.e. furthest away from the goals of gender equality. I have investigated this contention and read my evidence in the light of this debate.

One of the strongest findings of this thesis is that the activities of the MKP-SA greatly assisted most elite men to deal with their own emotional issues. My study focused on two key areas of interpersonal relationships: the ability of participants to express their feelings and fathering / father-son relations. In terms of the activities' effects on participants' relations with others, the activities were found to have mixed effects on the men's relationships with women, no effect on their relations with men from other races and classes and some positive effects on

their relations with gay men. The activities were found to have mixed effects on elite men's willingness to do pro-feminist work.

In the paragraphs that follow I elaborate on the effects identified above. The activities appear to have had the strongest positive effects on elite men's relationships with themselves. Many respondents reported that their ability to feel and to express emotions – one of the capacities that is generally not associated with hegemonic masculinity and is, indeed, sometimes regarded as an indication of a counter-hegemonic tendency (see for example, O'Sullivan et al 2006)– increased significantly due to the activities. Many men credited their newfound ability to express their feelings in terms of being in a single-sex setting which was specifically attending to emotions and promoting expression. This testifies to the efficacy of a group over traditional one-on-one therapy approach and has been confirmed by other studies of men's mythopoetic groups (e.g. Mankowski et al 2000, 191; Richard 2000, 169).<sup>34</sup>

The interviewees and some of their partners reported that this emotional honesty extended to their relationships with primary partners, which in turn led to better quality relationships. Pentz's (2000, 219) follow up findings with the men of one of American MKP centres showed improved or new connections with other men and significant others - more integrity, positive changes in relationships and friendships, increased confidence and openness with feelings, although he specified that more research is needed on effects of activities with significant others. Certainly, respondents reported that the activities encouraged and assisted them to both get in touch with their emotions and to express them – many for the first time to either men or women. While there is no necessary link between being able to express their feelings and to committing to the political goal of gender equality or of treating one's intimate partner equitably and

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<sup>34</sup> Richard also argues that the combination of activities of mythopoets – such as ritual, stories, drumming, activities and group work – make it a particularly viable approach for men who otherwise would shun traditional therapy.

respectfully, studies (e.g. Barker 2000) that have explored these connections (mostly among youth) have indeed found encouraging correlations between being more in tune with one's emotions and not being violent towards intimates, being more respectful and more democratic in relational decision making.

Respondents also reported that the activities of the MKP-SA also had very positive effects on their fathering and father-son relations. Pentz (2000, 215) provides a useful delineation of fatherhood: "Fathering can be thought of in four contexts: fathering one's own children, the fathering one did or did not receive as a child, fathering received from one's own father as an adult, and replacement fathering one might receive as an adult from other men." The activities of the MKP-SA presents powerful alternatives to (and, in some cases, replacements of) all four of the above fathering models to adult men that they can carry over to their own children – fathering that is accepting and embracing, non-patriarchal and encouraging of vulnerability and expression in their children – and their own fathers (including acceptance of the role that hegemonic masculinity has played in creating emotional distances). These activities can support the goal of gender equality by creating generations of sons that have enjoyed more knowledge, contact and intimacy with their fathers which in turn may contribute to a generation of more respectful, self-aware and possibly gender-equitable young men. Some of the men's children are already integrating some of the effects of the activities into their own lives. But, as noted below, there is a danger that the current members' focus only on the relationships that men have with their sons ignores the importance of their relationships with their daughters. This is one possible failing of MKP-SA work – that it privileges the importance of fathers and sons over that of fathers and daughters.<sup>35</sup>

The findings also show that the activities of this mythopoetic men's group were very positive for respondents' ability to interact with men in non-hegemonic ways. Some reported that these were the first times they had actually expressed

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<sup>35</sup> In March 2010, MKP-SA began a fathering group, called the "Fathering Circle", for both members and non-members, which meets bi-monthly and discusses various parenting issues.

themselves to a group of men. Many said that due to the activities they became more trusting of men. These was the same for all men, regardless of sexuality: In fact, gay respondents reported huge increases in their comfort levels with their self-definitions of manhood *due to* their being with other (straight) men – to the point that I wonder whether it is possible for gay men to achieve similar levels of comfort in a homosexual-only environment.<sup>36</sup> Men feeling comfortable with themselves and others being “non hegemonic” men is good for the men themselves, and for society as a whole.

There are certain aspects of MKP-SA’s activities that draw upon, support or even replicate hegemonic patterns of masculine behavior. Such patterns are not only harmful to women and marginal men but are indeed harmful to elite men themselves. One is the group’s emphasis on “mission” (life purpose). Men are constantly asked if they are “living in mission” and are challenged by others (often in the same I-Group) as to whether they are living their mission and, if not, to perform a “mission stretch” i.e. to enact something in real life that will fall into their life purpose as found on the NWTAs. But this reinforced the hegemonic masculinity principle that men are only worth something if they perform or achieve in the material world. Failure to achieve, to act, means failure as a man in the hegemonic masculinity model. As hooks (2004, 11-12) notes,

In patriarchal culture males are not allowed to simply be who they are and to glory in their unique identity. Their value is always determined by what they do. In anti-patriarchal culture males do not have to prove their value and worth. They know from birth that simply being gives them value, the right to be cherished and loved.

The same can be said of the men’s group’s very strong emphasis on time-keeping. The MKP-SA’s unforgiving time management and organization ethos is not in line with the reality of the very busy lives of its members and is harsh and unforgiving, thereby creating more stress for these men – men who already hold themselves to very high standards. Time-keeping is uncomfortable for some of the male participants and reflects (in some cases) – possibly – strict home and

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<sup>36</sup> Some of the MKP centres in the MKP run separate gay NWTAs.

school experiences which in turn may well have shaped them to be conformist (and hence, is complicit with hegemonic masculinity).

While the activities of the MKP-SA undoubtedly had overwhelmingly positive effects for participants insofar as how they regarded themselves, they had mixed effects on their relations with women. While some female partners reported that participants had more energy, were happier and more open, some of the men themselves reported being wary and more distrustful of women after the activities. This is directly due to the mythopoetic movement's stigmatization of women as being either "manipulators" or "victims". To counter this, the MKP-SA will need to question its reliance on Jungian essentialist ideas of gender as being immutable (see Schwalbe 1996, 213).

Many female partners reported a desire to be included in some of the men's group's activities. Currently, MKP-SA does not cater for women in any way and is committed to continuing as an organization only for men. For the MKP-SA to align itself more comfortably with gender equality, it would do well to experiment with more ways to include women into some of its activities while still allowing individual men the choice to include or exclude their partners<sup>37</sup>. The MKP-SA currently does not encourage members to discuss what they are bringing up in the men's group with their significant others and families. This is a problem because it isolates men from their domestic and social contexts and possibly gives them artificial feelings of separation from the world outside the homosocial space of MKP-SA. Some women partners have reported being left in the dark as major life decisions that affected them were being discussed by their husbands in the MKP-SA. This does not help build trust between women and men and does not bode well for contributing to gender equality.

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<sup>37</sup> This becomes particularly salient in light of gay members' partners, who, as men, could be included in all organizational activities, trainings, etc. In other words, it would be interesting to assess gay members' levels of comfort or discomfort with their partners attending the men's group activities versus that of straight men to determine whether it is in fact gender or integration that is the issue at hand. Would gay men hold onto a disintegrated view of the world, too (which is another aspect of hegemonic masculinity) or would they vote for integrating their emotional and public lives?

The activities of the MKP-SA were found to have no major effects (positive or negative) on men's relations with men of other races and classes. The failure to impact positively on race relations has caused disappointment and frustration, especially on the part of black members, which in turn may harm the latter's participation in the men's group. Given South Africa's racially divided past, the challenge of promoting reconciliation and racial integration lies before MKP-SA. The current MKP-SA approach is to increase the numbers of black participants – and in particular, middle class black men. This approach is superficial as it does not engage with the limitations of the current programmes (particularly their cultural homogeneity) and so is unlikely to promote the forging of a common masculine identity.

Some of the respondents reported being very aware of racial divisions within the men's group, and many said they wanted integration. But few came up with viable solutions. Since white men of the MKP-SA currently dominate in terms both of numbers and in terms of cultural affinity with the modus operandi of the organization, they need to do more than merely 'include' their black brothers in activities. It would help if they actively engaged, supported and assisted them through the activities, recognizing that the black men may not have the necessary support, language, technology, financial or even social skills (confidence) for interacting with predominantly 'white' activities and settings. At the minimum, the white men of the MKP-SA must desist from interrupting or otherwise blocking those black men who do participate in the men's group's activities.

Vastly different life experiences and challenges – due to class and culture – mean that men of different races found it difficult to relate on certain issues. Coloured men of middle to upper class status (two current co-leaders fall into this category) have reported struggling with race but not class issues. The organization is actively trying to recruit more black men of middle class backgrounds, but this is proving difficult, as it needs to convince these men to

trust what is still a white-led organization. Another interesting question is how white men of low income and education fare in the organization. As such, the men's mythopoetic group is a valuable testing ground for issues of race and class in contemporary South Africa. Seeing that it operates within the context of a post-apartheid South Africa, with white men having experienced the army and black men liberation armies and / or imprisonment, the organization may wish to revisit some of its processes on the NWTAs, specifically those to do with confinement, searching and other activities associated with the military.

The activities of the MKP-SA were found to have some positive effects on men's relations with gay men. By and large, the men of the MKP-SA accepted gay men, and the activities certainly helped them become less uncomfortable with male-to-male physical intimacy. There was some evidence of homophobia, but no more so than was to be expected from and in any predominantly straight men's group. Some respondents reported greater acceptance and understanding of gay men due to contact on the activities. The MKP-SA would do well to ensure gay men are chosen and well trained as facilitators, especially on the NWTAs, and the men's group will need to become accepting of their gay brothers socially (especially the young ones) if it wishes to become truly inclusive.

The activities were found to have very little positive effect on men's willingness to do pro-feminist work. In general, MKP-SA participants were not well informed about nor sympathetic to the goals of feminism here understood as a commitment to ending the systematic domination of women by men. Most respondents were not interested in doing pro-feminist work. Some believed that by doing the inner psychological work they would indirectly contribute to gender equality or at least to improving relations between men and women. But there were some participants who psychologized inequality - in effect blaming the apparent structural differences on those they considered to be others in terms of their gender, their poverty and/or their racial or cultural characteristics.

Although some respondents reported that the activities and the support they received in the MKP-SA helped them to become more involved in pro-feminist work, most of what their involvement was in groups that benefited themselves or their immediate communities. Many respondents felt strongly that the MKP-SA could be active in pro-feminist work involving men, such as anti-violence groups, fathering groups and work with men in prison.

There is a need for further study of the men's mythopoetic groups working in South Africa, how they operate, who they recruit and what their influence is. Among the issues that should be examined are: the effects on different groups of men e.g. poor men, black men and rural men; conducting research of *other* men's mythopoetic groups, and comparing and contrasting the findings; researching the effects of such activities in different societies (especially, developing countries and those cultures with different gender definitions); and examining for other determinants (besides the activities) on a baseline cohort.

### **Celebrating Complexity**

Gender work amongst men is inevitably fractured, uneven and contradictory. It is best understood, therefore, not as something pure and unambiguously promoted (or counteracting) the goal of gender equality but rather as a process that may contribute to more equitable gender relations in one moment and block progressive gender change at another.

I started this dissertation by making the argument for the need for a more nuanced assessment of mythopoetic men's groups that takes into account the possibility of the potential of their activities to contribute to gender equality. My findings have vindicated this position, showing that while the largest such group in South Africa reflects certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity in its understandings of men and in the actual unfolding of its activities, and thereby also reinforces some elements of patriarchy, there are in equal measure aspects of the activities that are non-hegemonic and serve to promote gender equality.

The activities of the MKP-SA promote certain non-hegemonic forms of masculinity; for example, co-operation over competition, emotion over rationality and vulnerability over emotional distance; however, they also promote certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity e.g. hierarchy over equality, individualism over the group, dominance and aggression over subservience and peace and risk taking over safety. Similarly, the men of the MKP-SA are openly affectionate towards each other and do not subscribe to many forms of self-control; however, they are exclusionary (as in not allowing women into their activities and spaces) and escapist (their retreats are all run outside of urban areas, in nature, and in secret), two key aspects of hegemonic masculinity (Haenfler 2004, 77).

Organizations that work on the gender terrain, particularly those that work with men, cannot avoid the complexity and contradiction that are features of gender relations. As Haenfler (2004, 99) notes, “There can be multiple expressions of masculinity within any particular movement. There is a constant tug of war between hegemonic masculinity and more progressive expressions of manhood.” Similarly, as others have commented, it is instructive to see the participants of mythopoetic men’s groups as working to do away and *simultaneously* wanting to retain certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity (Haenfler 2004, 94; Schwalbe 1996, 212) – to see these men as both striving for better and being fallible, both being adventurous and strong and both feeling timid and weak.

The men in mythopoetic men’s groups are striving – through participation in these groups’ activities – to hold themselves and others accountable, which is quite unique because “many men have no connection with any sense of morality or ethic besides ‘what I want is right’ and ‘I get what I want any way I want it.’” (Pentz 2000, 220). And they are men who are looking for a deeper form of bonding than that of other destructive male bonding activities that promote violence, disease and women bashing (Schwalbe 1996, 213). Finally, if we are to make judgments, it is safe to say that the men in mythopoetic groups are at the

very least – however misguided – trying to deal with their problems, face their issues and enter into discussions of gender and masculinity, and how these play out in society.

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## 8. APPENDIXES

### A. List of my involvement in MKP-SA and MKP-Canada West

- March 2003: Completed New Warrior Training Adventure (MKP—SA NWTA 5 in Onrus, South Africa)
- April to May 2003: Completed Initial Integration Group training in Cape Town, South Africa
- June 2003 to February 2004: Member; Vancouver, B.C., Canada I-Group
- October 2003: Man of Service, MKP - Canada West NWTA (Rock Lake, Alberta)
- November 2003: “Guts” [Psychotherapy drama re-enactment] Facilitation Training (Shadow Healing Workshop) (Vancouver Island, B.C., Canada)
- October to December 2003: Voluntary writer, *MKP Journal Online*: (“Bed Bugs with Love”, published November 2003, “An Interview with Bill Kauth,” published December 2003)
- January 2004: “*Head, Heart and Soul*” facilitator (Vancouver, BC, Canada)
- March 2004: Staffer, MKP – SA NWTA 7, (Onrus, South Africa)
- April to June 2004: MKP – SA I-Group facilitator (Cape Town, South Africa)
- Member, MKP—SA Lodge Keepers’ Society
- July 2004: MKP – SA *Winter Festival* participant and organizer (Onrus, South Africa)
- 2006 – 2007: I-Group participant
- September 2008: Brother Dancer (a member who goes to participate in dance ritual on Nwta), Nwta 23

## B. Questionnaire

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How old were you at the time of NwTA? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_ For how long? \_\_\_\_ (years).
4. What was your occupation at the time of NwTA? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your current Marital Status? (check one)  
 Single                       How long?  
 Married                       How long?  
 Separated                       How long?  
 Divorced                       How long?  
 Widowed                       How long?
6. What was your marital status **at the time of NwTA**?  
 Single                       How long?  
 Married                       How long?  
 Separated                       How long?  
 Divorced                       How long?  
 Widowed                       How long?
7. Do you have any children?  
 Number  
 Number at home  
 Number living with ex-wife/former partner
8. Where do you live?  
 City  
 Suburbs  
 Countryside/Rural
9. What is your income?  
 less than R1000 per month  
 R1001 to 5000 per month  
 R5001 to 10 000 per month  
 over R10,000 per month
10. What was your income **at the time of the NwTA**?  
 less than R1000 per month  
 R1001 to 5000 per month  
 R5001 to 10 000 per month  
 over R10,000 per month
11. What is your spouse/Partner's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What is your spouse/Partner's income? \_\_\_\_\_ R/month

13. What is your highest education level?

- Primary school
- High school
- Technical school or community college
- University—one degree
- University—Masters degree or higher

14a. Please name your religion or spiritual practice: \_\_\_\_\_

14b. How important is your religion or spiritual practice?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Little or no importance

15. What are your hobbies or pastimes (please list the top three):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. What racial and language groups do you identify yourself with (please tick all that apply)?

- Black
- White
- Coloured
- Indian
- Chinese
- English as mother language speaker
- Afrikaans as mother language speaker
- Xhosa as mother tongue speaker
- Other language as mother tongue speaker (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

17. How did you hear about MKP?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. Below are some reasons men might give for joining a men's group. Please tick how important these reasons were for you to join MKP.

**Very  
Important**

**Somewhat  
Important**

**Not  
Important**

1) To make friends

2) For emotional support

- 3) To solve personal problems
- 4) To learn about other men
- 5) To share thoughts and feelings about being a man
- 6) To explore my sexuality
- 7) To examine problems men encounter in careers
- 8) To be more active politically or in community work
- 9) To develop personal authority
- 10) To improve my relationships with women/children/parents
- 11) To improve my relationships with men
- 12) To examine problems men have in traditional roles (father, husband)
- 13 ) To explore my sexuality towards men
- 14) To explore my sexuality towards women
- 15) To find a community
- 16) To learn how to express myself
- 17 ) To find meaning in life
- 18) Other (please specify):

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19. Cast your mind back to the time you signed up for initiation. What was happening in your life at that time that may have influenced you sign up for the Nwta?

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20. What other organisations (e.g., AA, book club, PTA) had you joined **before** joining MKP? Why did you leave them – or why are you still participating in them?

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21. What other organisations (e.g., AA, book club, PTA) are you a member of **now**? How often do you participate in them – and why?

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21b. Do you consider yourself an active participant in MKP? If your answer is “yes”, go to question 22. If your answer is “no”, please explain why:

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22. Are you in an I-Group now? \_\_\_\_ How often do you meet? \_\_\_\_ times per month

23. How many staffings have you done? \_\_\_\_ MOS? \_\_\_\_

24. In what other ways are you active in MKP?

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25. Below are experiences men report as being important to them in men’s groups. Which of these do you consider important for you in MKP? Please tick.

	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Not Important</b>
1) Experimenting in the group by doing or saying new things			
2) Sharing thoughts and feelings about being a man			
3) Learning about my personality			
4) Getting insights into the causes and sources of my problems			
5) Examining men’s attitudes towards women			
6) Examining men’s attitudes towards			

other men

- 7) Examining social/community issues
- 8) Being confronted and challenged
- 9) Examining problems men have with traditional roles (husband, father, etc.)
- 10) Experiencing support, joy, excitement
- 11) Learning more about my sexuality
- 12) Helping others
- 13) Being part of a group / friends / social
- 14) Learning problem solving skills
- 15) Learning that my problems are not unique – finding communion
- 16) Finding community
- 17) Building community
- 18) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

26. In your opinion, how likely would men in the following situations participate in MKP work (either sign up for NWTM or keep participating)?

<b>Likely To Participate</b>	<b>Not Likely To Participate</b>	<b>Definitely Would NOT Participate</b>
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MEN WHO:

- 1) Are in the midst of a personal crisis
- 2) Are in unstable marriages
- 3) Are in psychotherapy or some other type of counselling
- 4) Are satisfied with their lives

- 5) Are depressed
- 6) Are successful in careers
- 7) Are happily married
- 8) Are about to become fathers
- 9) Are in some other type of men's group
- 10) Have long-standing personal problems.
- 11) Have few male friends
- 12) Have high self-confidence
- 13) Are emotionally literate
- 14) Are not interested in emotional literacy
- 15) Are in some type of 12 step program
- 16) Other (please specify)

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27. How long have you been in an I-Group? \_\_\_\_\_ weeks/months/years (circle one).

28. Have you ever left an existing I-Group? \_\_\_ If "yes", why? \_\_\_\_\_

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29. When did your original I-Group start? \_\_\_\_\_

30. How many men started in your original I-Group? \_\_\_\_\_

31. How many of the original starters are left in your I-Group (attend regularly)?

\_\_\_\_\_

32) Is your original I-Group still operating? Y/N

33) If not still operating and if you found a different I-Group, how did you find a new I-Group? \_\_\_\_\_

34) If you entered a new I-Group and/or had new men join your I-Group after the initial Cycle 1 Integration, what did the I-Group do to integrate the new man?

35. Men **leave** men's groups for a variety of reasons. For what reasons below have men left your I-Group (Tick as many as apply)?

- No-one left the I-group while I was a member
- Member(s) did not want to reveal things about their marriage
- Disagreements over sexuality
- Disagreements over sexual orientation
- No-one shared that member's particular problem
- Group disapproved of member(s)' handling of personal relationships
- Member(s) moved out of town or area
- Member(s) found I-Group too emotional or disturbing
- Member(s) found I-Group too confrontational
- Member(s) felt they didn't get enough emotional support in I-Group
- Member(s) felt that they got what they needed from I-Group
- Member(s) wanted a group of both men and women
- Member(s) felt that I-Group was **not** intense or confrontational enough
- Member(s) were dissatisfied with the I-Groups's lack of community action
- Group disapproved of member(s)' behaviour **outside** of I-Group
- Group disapproved of member(s)' behaviour **inside** I-Group
- Member(s) were dissatisfied with the protocols
- Member(s) lacked enough time to come to I-Group meetings
- Member(s) relocated to another part of the country/world
- Member(s) became too busy in their careers/families
- Other reason (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

36. What do you like about MKP?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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37. What do you dislike – and would like to change – about MKP?

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38. In ten years' time (in 2015), do you see yourself still participating in MKP – in any capacity (email list serve, I-Group, etc.)? Why or why not?

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If “yes” to 38, in what way do you see yourself participating in MKP in 2015?

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This is the **end** of the questionnaire, but please feel free to add any comments – particularly concerning participation or dropping out in MKP – below.

Thank you again for participating in this research project.

END

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### **C. List of interview questions**

#### **Interview Questions:**

1. When did you hear of MKP for the first time? How? Who introduced you?  
Feelings towards MKP? Men's work?
2. How did those close to you react to your interest in MKP?
3. Cast your mind back to the time of the NWTA. What was happening in your life at that time?
4. What did you expect to get from the NWTA?
5. What made you sign up for the NWTA?
6. How was it different from your expectations?
7. Tell me about your experience of the NWTA.
8. Tell me about your experience of I-Group facilitation – what you learned, disappointments, expectations, etc.
9. And then your I-Group continued to meet?
10. Describe your I-Group's history – changes, preparations, continuity, communications, decision-making, socialising, etc.
11. In your I-group, how are decisions made? Are you happy with the way decisions are made?

12. What is your present MKP involvement? Why?
13. Are you in another men's support group right now? Were you in one prior to MKP? How is it different from MKP?
14. What benefits do you obtain from MKP work?
15. What changes would you like to see in MKP?
16. How has your definition of masculinity changed since MKP?
17. Socially – have you made long-lasting friendships through MKP? Business contacts? Lovers? Why or why not?
18. What kind of men join MKP?
19. Why do men drop out of MKP-SA?
20. What factors keep you in MKP work?
21. Where do you see yourself in MKP in ten years' time?
22. Anything else to add?

END

#### D. List of participant-observation sites and dates (all in 2005)

##### I Groups

<i>Number:</i>	<i>Geographic location</i>	<i>Date/s Visited</i>	<i>Number of men</i>
1.	Newlands	Jan 20 and Feb 03	4
2.	Hout Bay	Feb 9	11
3.	Belville	Feb 10	5
4.	Sea Point	Feb 24	7
5.	Claremont	Mar 07	6 + 3 guests

##### Other

- ⇒ Council Meeting One: 27 Jan
- ⇒ AGM and Picnic: Jan 29
- ⇒ Father-son hike, Krom Rivier: Feb 12
- ⇒ Council Meeting Two: 9 March
- ⇒ Honouring Ceremony: March 22
- ⇒ Visit to Embizweni: Apr 4

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**E. List of interviewees (with assigned names as in text plus age, race, sexual orientation)**

<i>Names</i> <sup>38</sup>	<i>Age:</i>	<i>Race:</i>	<i>Sexuality</i> <sup>39</sup>
1. Solomon	26	black (Zulu)	S
2. John	40	white	S
3. Stephen	38	white	S
4. James	50	black (Xhosa)	S
5. Bill	38	white	S
6. Edward	39	white	G
7. George	55	white	G
8. Adam	48	white	S
9. Jack	40	white	S
10. David	60	white	S
11. Johan	40	white	S
12. Jill	?	white	S

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<sup>38</sup> Pseudonyms assigned by me

<sup>39</sup> "S" denotes self-identified as heterosexual, "G" denotes self-identified as homosexual

**F. List of questionnaire respondents (with assigned names as in text plus age at time of doing NwTA, race, relationship status and religion)**

<i>Names</i> <sup>40</sup>	<i>Age</i> <sup>41</sup>	<i>Race:</i>	<i>Relationship status</i>	<i>Religion (self-identified)</i>
1. Gary	51	white	living with partner	“let there be choice”
2. Eric	33	white	married	Jewish
3. XXX <sup>42</sup>	34	white	married	no religion
4. Roger	44	white	married	Jewish
5. Henry	59	white	divorced	Emissaries of Divine Light
6. Jim	47	white	married	“leaning towards Buddhism”
7. Paul	42	white	married	Methodist
8. Chris	53	white	divorced	no religion
9. Albert	41	white	married	no religion
10. Joe	54	white	married	Taoist/ Buddhist
11. Adam	49	white	single	Christian
12. Edward	34	white	single (Gay) <sup>43</sup>	no religion
13. XXX	31	white	single	no religion
14. XXX	41	white	married	Seeker
15. XXX	44	white	married	no religion
16. Mark	42	white	married	no religion
17. George	55	white	single (Gay) <sup>44</sup>	Buddhist
18. Nick	41	white	married	no religion
19. Saul	60	white	divorced	Jewish

<sup>40</sup> Pseudonyms assigned by me

<sup>41</sup> At time of doing NwTA

<sup>42</sup> “XXX”: No pseudonym was assigned as respondents’ answers were not quoted in paper.

<sup>43</sup> Cref interviewee list

<sup>44</sup> Self-identified as gay.