

# Speaking for Ourselves

Masculinities and Femininities Amongst  
Students at the University of Zimbabwe



Edited by Rudo B. Gaidzanwa

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# Making Student Men at the University of Zimbabwe: Politics, Masculinity and Democracy

ALLEN GORE

## Introduction

Contemporary society has been characterized by the growth in the study and theorizing of men and masculinities. Masculinity has become problematic in recent years in the academic discourse, because it is seen as a stumbling block to the attainment of gender equity even in institutions of higher learning, such as the University of Zimbabwe. The birth of the critical study of men has been due to various forms of inequalities, which various masculinities perpetuate in society. These social divisions include those between men and women, which are perceived as natural or based on race, ethnicity, class, age and disability. These forms of social stratification are disrupting institutions of higher learning such as the University of Zimbabwe, especially in student politics, yet members of the public view a university as fertile soil for sowing seeds of equality and democracy. Student politics at the University of Zimbabwe is a contested terrain characterized by hegemonic forms of masculinities exhibited through high competition and violence. In the rocky terrain of student politics, female students and disabled men feel excluded. Therefore, they do not have representatives to champion their causes. The prevailing economic hardships, which have been the product of neo-liberal policies adopted by the government in 1991, influence the expression of masculinities in student politics. This study aims to examine how economic hardship impacts on the expression of masculinities in student politics through demonstrations, political galas, corruption and struggles for democracy in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe.

This study aimed to identify the different masculinities on campus, to identify problems faced by females and disabled male students in entering into the competitive masculine politics. It also aimed to establish why there are contradictions in forms of masculinities shown by students in politics. The study also examined the ways in which economic hardship has impacted on the expression of masculinities in student politics. This study, as part of the Gender Studies Association and Affirmative Action project, sought to explore how the struggles to achieve gender equity and democracy at the University of Zimbabwe, are affected by the various forms of masculinities exhibited by male students. I hope this paper will go a long way towards more rational gender policy formulation at the University of Zimbabwe especially with regard to student politics.

## Definitions of masculinity

The term masculinity refers to forms of gendered identities marking out “correct” or “appropriate” styles of being a man, which are exhibited in institutional patterns, behaviors, experiences, appearances and practices. In gender studies, masculinity is a contested concept because it is multifaceted and multidimensional. Masculinity embraces such factors as age, ethnicity, social class, cultural background and religion. (Hearn 1992.) Despite its diversity, masculinity can be seen to form gendered identities marking out ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ ways of being. (Butler, 1990) Hearn defines masculinity or masculinities as the dominant forms of male behavior in a particular setting. Similarly, Haywood *et al* (1994) argued that masculinity / masculinities entail having the power to define what is ‘normal’ or ‘ordinary’ male behavior. Osborne (1995) noted that masculinity is connected with men’s attempt to control women through force, coercion, abuse and silencing hence women’s experiences of subordination and violence in various social settings.

Masculinity, generally, is no longer a single entity which is universally accepted but changes from one generation to another as men change social position through class, age, ethnicity, disability, race, sexuality and other related social divisions in the modern world. (Hearn *et al* 1998) Hegemonic masculinities are those dominant forms of male behavior in a particular situation or setting. Subordinate masculinities are those forms of male behavior, which are perceived to be less competitive and hence are not manly. Disability denotes any restriction or lack, resulting from impairment of ability to perform any activity in a manner or within the range considered normal for human beings (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998: 145). Thus, the masculinities of disabled men tend to be influenced by the restrictions and impairments of such men in their performance of activities that are considered ‘normal’ for men. Contradictions in masculinity may result from opposing perceptions and prescriptions around male behavior especially when some people argue that there should be a “form” of universal male behavior.

## Methodology

In this study, data were collected using in-depth interviews so as to understand the different qualities of masculinities exhibited by students in politics. Student leaders in the Student Executive Council (S.E.C) were interviewed together with other students who had lost the election. The main aim of these interviews was to fulfill the objectives of the study by exploring the following issues:

- a) The different types of masculinities deployed by student politicians.
- b) The co-existence of religious and non-religious student masculinities in campus politics.
- c) The motivations of male students with different masculinities for running for formal office in student politics.
- d) The de-motivating factors which constrain female students from running for formal office in student politics.

- e) The views of male and female students on the hierarchical organization of the student body, which is more masculine than feminine.
- f) How male students manage to eliminate rivals, especially females.

Group discussions were carried out so as to find out how students perceive masculinities in student politics. These group discussions aimed at establishing the following:

- a) The relationship between masculinities and looting of student funds by student leaders.
- b) The link between disability and subordinate forms of masculinities.
- c) Male students' perception of participation of female students in student politics.
- d) The relationship between democracy and masculinities in student politics.
- e) General problems encountered in student politics.

Complete observation was employed so as to assess how male student leaders behave when addressing meetings in the open area near the clinic. This was intended to show how male students try to glorify certain types of masculinities and to keep supporters behind them.

### The sample design

This study is based on third year male and female students who reside on campus at the University of Zimbabwe. The researcher sought to focus on third year students because they are the ones who, unlike second and first years, have more experience of the political climate prevailing at the University of Zimbabwe. Furthermore, this was less time consuming and less expensive for the researcher. In this study, simple random sampling was used to select male and female respondents who reside in complexes one and four. Complex One is a residence hall for male students and Complex Four is for females. A list of rooms from ground floor, first floor and second floor was drawn and room numbers were written on small pieces of papers. The pieces of papers with room numbers were put in a bucket and 30 males and 20 females room numbers were drawn. The current members of the Student Executive Council (S.E.C.) were not included as they were approached on individual bases. The same was done for disabled students. The S.E.C. leaders and disabled students were excluded from the main sample because the researcher thought they were few in number and would not be represented if simple random sampling were carried out. These groups were interviewed on the bases of their participation in struggles for elected positions.

**Table 1: Total number of students interviewed in this study**

Students	Males	Females
Able bodied	30	20
Disabled	10	2
SEC Leaders	7	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>23</b>

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Troubled masculinities***

Gender studies poses a threat to academia, as such studies challenge deeply embedded institutional/cultural practices which threaten men who are privileged. In some instances especially with regard to politics, men react violently to challenges by women who threaten their positions. Meena (1992:1) defines gender as "socially constructed and culturally variable roles that women and men play in their daily lives". Gender as a subject reveals institutionalised inequalities between men and women, which are ideologically justified as natural. (Lips, 1993). Student politics at the University of Zimbabwe has remained a male domain since the university was founded. Masculinity at the University of Zimbabwe is a diversified concept, which involves, age, ethnicity, class, cultural background and disability. These forms of diversification in masculinities are problematic in student politics as students compete for very few positions in the Student Executive Council and Student Representative Assembly. In this regard, Bailey (1977) noted that, politics is a competitive or serious business characterized by the use of pragmatic and normative rules for one to win a prize, which has honor, power and responsibility. With few positions (prizes) in the student body at the University of Zimbabwe, male students will do almost anything to eliminate rivals especially females, be it through moral or immoral channels such as sexual harassment. Furthermore, Mihyo and Omari (1991:12) noted that, students in African universities continue their traditional role of fighting against oppression and evils through demonstrations.

Therefore, such masculine behaviors, which are exhibited by young male students in politics are perceived as problematic by older men and women, hence the conceptualization of these masculinities as troubled. (Hearn *et al*/1998:18). Troubled masculinities are characterized by contradictions, discomfort, unease and uncertainty. In a bid to curb such masculine behavior, which impinges on the rights of others students, the University of Zimbabwe administration has developed some measures to silence these masculinities. For example, Ordinance 30 of the University of Zimbabwe prohibits any form of fighting around campus, stipulating that anyone caught fighting would be suspended from the University of Zimbabwe.

### ***Masculinity and silencing of feminism***

Feminism has been defined as "the recognition of systematic discrimination against women on the grounds of gender and a commitment to work towards change". (Tsikata 1991 cited in Meena 1992:2). Berger *et al* (1995:58), Dubbert (1979:83) and Osborne (1995: 637), argued that masculinity is connected to men's attempt to control women through force, coercion, abuse and silencing, hence women's experience of violence and subordination in various social settings like the University of Zimbabwe. Such experiences of violence and subordination are meant to put females in their "proper place" so as to reduce competition and resistance from women. In an article on the chilly campus climate in Canadian universities, Osborne (1995: 640)

highlighted an incident in which a male student, Marc Lepine, on December 6 1989, stormed into a classroom armed with a machine gun at the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal and ordered all men to leave. He then opened fire on female students, screaming his hatred for women and feminism. Therefore, such incidents in institutions of higher learning are meant to silence women's activism. This silencing of women impinges negatively on democracy. At the University of Zimbabwe, there are many incidents of intimidation of female student politicians so that politics remain a male domain.

### ***Hegemonic and subordinate masculinities at the University of Zimbabwe***

Hearn (1996: 203) noted that, masculinity is the "deep center", the essence of a man upon which all behaviors and identities are evaluated. The youth culture prevailing in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe shows that masculinity is not a unified entity as there are contradictions in the ways a man should behave. Therefore, the masculinities of young men in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe, some dominant and others subordinate, exist side by side. In student politics at the University of Zimbabwe, male students, some of whom consume copious amounts of alcohol and participate actively in demonstrations, claim to be possessors of the hegemonic masculinities, although they do not command the material resources, which are the pre-conditions of power. By virtue of being able to make decisions, which might affect the day to day running of the University through demonstrations, these male students who drink alcohol to excess and are willing to be violent, claim to possess the dominant masculinities on campus. In the youth culture that prevails at the University of Zimbabwe, drinking alcohol demonstrates an element of hardness and indicates that a student is willing to take risks. This element of being a "wild man" is important as it enhances a student's chance of being elected to a position in the Student Executive Council. In the event that, the Ministry of Higher Education does not dispense payout in time, such a "wild man" would not hesitate to call for a demonstration, which is the traditional male avenue to for showing manliness to the public.

On the other hand, subordinate masculinities at the University of Zimbabwe, are perceived to be linked to disability, ethnicity, religion, age and non-possession of material resources, which are conditions of power and closely linked to students' social class. In student politics, men showing subordinate forms of masculinities are not considered masculine, but are perceived to be exhibiting some elements of 'sissy ness' in them. These male students politicians are not very reactionary and in the concepts outlined by Hearn (2000: 4) and Pearson (2000: 2), they might be called "new men". They are gentle, caring and less militant than the "wild men". Haywood *et al* (1994: 42) noted that chauvinism, toughness and machismo are forms of masculinity associated with working class men, but these forms of masculinity are unequal. Masculinities perpetuate inequalities as Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:145) highlighted. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) argued that boys with disabilities are left out

in the cold if they are not able to conform to hegemonic masculinities such as being aggressive, competitive and violent. The same applies to the ethnic minorities whose masculinities are not taken into consideration. In sum, masculinities in various social settings are not unified entities, but they are characterized by contradiction and inconsistency. In other words one man's style of being masculine is not appropriate for another man, despite the fact that hegemonic masculinities seek universalism in male behavior.

### ***Marx's theory of class***

In his analysis of class, Marx attempted to analyze how one's class position influences their participation in politics, religion, education and so on. Using such an analysis, it could be expected that given the prevailing economic hardships, which are a product of neo-liberal policies adopted by the government in 1991, students from moneyed backgrounds would be more active in student politics. Therefore, class position, which is also an economic position, plays an important role in determining which people venture into various socio-economic fields (Giddens 1981: 27).

Using the same analysis of class, Gaidzanwa (1993:22), noted that students at the University of Zimbabwe could be divided into three classes that is, "nose brigades", "SRB" (severe rural background) and "born location". The "nose brigades" are students from middle class families who have attended former whites only, group A schools. The "SRBs" are students from peasant or working class parents who have attended group B schools, missions, local authority or government run schools. The "born locations" are students from urban working class parents who were born in locations of high-density suburbs. They have attended group A or B schools. These classes are closely linked to students' economic positions as they reflect the schools students attended and these backgrounds usually affect motivation for campaigning for office in student politics. For example, there are more students in the category of "SRBs" who qualify to study at the University of Zimbabwe. These students would usually have attended the better rural day and boarding schools. Therefore, this motivates such students to campaign for office in student politics as they can easily mobilize former schoolmates for support.

### ***Socialization Theories***

The socialization process affects how issues of gender and disability are constructed in society. During primary socialization in early childhood, females and disabled men are supposed to take passive roles in decision-making processes. (Kajawu 2000: 2). Furthermore, females are supposed to participate less in public domains involving politics because participation by women is assumed to show their immorality. These teachings of early childhood socialization are internalized by females and cannot be easily changed even during years of secondary socialization. Males have also been socialized in the opposite manner, and they assume that when females take part in politics, they are over-stepping their boundaries. Such women are ridiculed for daring to participate in student politics. Given such circumstances, females take the back

seat in student politics because they have been made to believe that politics is a rough game and that only men can manage the competition. The issue of socialization can also be extended to disabled male students who, most of the time, are confined to their rooms at the University of Zimbabwe. They have been made to believe that disability is an illness, which exempts them from participation in social activities such as student politics (Oliver and Barnes 1998:86). In sum, the way one has been socialized affects his or her participation in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe. Some parents view politics as dirty hence they will discourage their children, both male and female, from early childhood, from venturing into such activities. However, some parents believe that politics is more masculine than feminine. Therefore, with such perceptions amongst parents, it becomes problematic for male and female students to venture into politics even if they want to.

### The University of Zimbabwe's Gender Culture

The University of Zimbabwe is one of the institutions, which clearly shows a very masculine gender culture prevailing in various socio-economic and political activities on campus. The University of Zimbabwe is run by men, largely for the benefit of men, and men outnumber females as students and staff. Table 2 below shows the numbers of male and female students enrolled for the February 1999 intake by faculty.

**Table 2: Male and Female Enrolment for February 1999 Intake by Faculty**

Faculty	Males	Females	Total
Agriculture	76	26	102
Engineering	144	9	153
Medicine	197	83	280
Science	145	61	206
Veterinary Science	25	7	32
Social Studies	197	159	356
Education	185	77	262
Law	44	42	86
Arts	180	161	341
Commerce	169	75	244
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 362</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>2 062</b>

Source: Assistant Registrar, Records and Registration.

Student enrolment figures reveal that males make up 70% and females 30% of the students at the University of Zimbabwe. Since 1979 and after independence in 1980, the student figures have stayed around 75% for males and 25% females. The 5% increase in female enrolment has been the result of the adoption of the affirmative action program for females. However, many males, who attacked the sponsors and the University of Zimbabwe for adopting such a program, did not receive this

affirmative action program enthusiastically. Given the fact that the University of Zimbabwe is male dominated in its enrolment and staff, it is difficult for females to penetrate such a system, as men tend to support men and exclude women from the corridors of power by any means necessary. Therefore, men in the corridors of power usually trivialize issues of sexual harassment of female politicians by male politicians. Females are easily eliminated, as they do not have effective defense mechanisms. In sum, participation in student politics is relegated to a minor issue, as females are more concerned with their safety, which can only be achieved by avoiding political activities around the University of Zimbabwe.

### **Essentialism, Reductionism, Reification and Gender**

Essentialism refers to a tendency or desire to discover some 'core' gender identities, which are closely associated with men and masculinities. The common shape which masculinity takes is the presentation of fixed traits of male behavior such as aggression, violence, competitiveness, rationality as essential and natural. Therefore, all individuals who are identified as "men" are assumed to have these sets of characteristics. Essentialism overlaps with reductionism, which implies a loss of complexity and diversity in favor of universal similarities, which reduce the importance of cultural differences, age, disability and other social divisions (Pearson 2000:3). This explains why though there are different masculinities in student politics, such differences are not theorized or explained. In the public mind, most male students from the University of Zimbabwe are often considered hooligans and 'wild men'. Essentialism and reductionism are closely linked with reification, which is the treating of social and cultural products as "things". The whole idea of "things" shows something, which is external to the observer and cannot be changed by the intervention of the observer. For example, a tree is a tree and will remain a tree forever. This concept of thing-hood is of importance in discussing issues of gender as "men are men and women are women", a tendency that reinforces the existing inequalities and influences poor female participation in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe. The above approaches present masculinity as the reigning paradigm in governing the public domain of student politics at the University of Zimbabwe.

### **General characteristics of a male student politician**

Student politics has largely remained a traditional avenue for UBAs (Members of the University Bachelors Association, an imagined community of male students) to exhibit their masculinity. In *The Politics* Aristotle (1962), cited in Hearn (1992:30) noted that men dominate the public domain and politics in comparison to women, hence the notion of "public men". Student politics is one window for a UBA to show his manliness and he is not supposed to be intimidated by anything. Arthur Mutambara, then president of the Student Executive Council in 1989, characterized

the University of Zimbabwe as the last island of democracy in Zimbabwe. A “true cadre” in student politics, should not be “politically shy” and he should not be “politically castrated” by the existence of repressive institutional and state apparatus such as the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) or “Central Intimidation Organization” as the students term it. A student leader’s speeches should be full of militancy and vigor to show that the leader is not fearful, even of suspension, from the University of Zimbabwe. A political guru in student politics has the prerogative of saying anything, be it moral or immoral. Furthermore, for one to survive the political climate at the University of Zimbabwe, he must be vocal and florid in expression. For example, in one circular by the Student Executive Council (S.E.C.), it was noted that:

Graham Fredrick William Hill (the Vice Chancellor) has perpetrated worse racism and fascism than Hitler & Ian Smith combined. Since his appointment as the Vice Condom (VC) by and for ZANU PF he has fired 197 Union members. All of these are BLACK. Hill robbed black AFRICAN students of their constitutional rights. He has banned alcohol consumption by black students. With his condomised leadership, standards at the University of Zimbabwe have fallen to a record low. University of Zimbabwe will never be a colony again..

In order to show his masculinity, a UBA must be anti-government in his approach or critical of government policies so as to be a spokesperson for the public and students in general. Therefore, male students noted that one should not be a “political prostitute” that is, a person who changes from one political position to another. Male students who drink alcohol noted that the current S.E.C. (2000–2001), which is led by religious leaders who are constantly referred to as “brothers,” (fundamentalist Christians) lack such essential characteristics of being manly. The “brothers” according to one male student studying Economics in his 3rd year, lack the real blood of a UBA as they constantly abide by moral principles enshrined in the Holy Bible. This UBA went on to note that the “religious S.E.C.” is balancing on the edge of a knife as it faces a dilemma of balancing the demands of drunkards and those of sisters and brothers in Christ who supported or voted them into power. Most UBAs who are not church oriented argue that the Christian community has let them down as the religious leaders are too scared to call for demonstrations to challenge governmental policies, a traditional way of expressing masculinity.

### **Masculinity and alcohol consumption in student politics**

“S.R.Bs” and “born location” male students have extensively dominated the political arena of the University of Zimbabwe. These UBAs consider themselves the “real cadres” in the political arena. The male “nose brigades” do not usually participate in student politics because, they consider student politics to be strongly linked to acts of hooliganism, hence they shun such behavior. Male “nose brigades” have the material resources to campaign in student politics since they are middle class students, but they prefer to exhibit their masculinity by dating many girls rather than participating in union activities. Furthermore, unlike the “SRBs” and “born

location", for "nose" men, student politics is not a stepping stone to material resources in the student body, which are the avenue to influence and power in achieving hegemonic masculinity. For the "SRBs" and "born location" student, politics provide one avenue to gain access to money and national politics. This explains why they participate in union activities with gusto.

UBAs who drink alcohol, often to excess, at the University of Zimbabwe claim that they are "real cadres" or "real UBAs" in student politics. Drinking alcohol at the University of Zimbabwe is a key signifier of dominant masculinities, which are admired in the prevailing youth culture. The UBAs who take alcohol are more aggressive, competitive, hooligans as they are considered the 'wild men' around campus. They get involved in fights in clubs outside campus and within campus. They may fight other student men and 'discipline' their women on campus through beatings. As indicated by Chagonda, in this volume, they revel in these encounters, which are considered a 'rite of passage' by new UBAs. One UBA studying Politics and Administration in his final year noted that when a UBA gets drunk, he is a very different person and with a part of the drunken self, he will take more risks than usual and will sink into union activities without fear.

## UBA and election strategies

Despite being haunted by inadequate material resources for campaigning, the "SRBs" and "born location" UBAs mobilize their few resources and pool them in order to get a few candidates into the S.E.C. The candidates who are usually encouraged to campaign for leadership in the Student Executive Council (S.E.C) are usually former head boys, prefects or those who were popular at school and are capable of speaking in front of others. The candidate and his "boys" or friends have the task of mobilizing other students to rally behind them and this is done by photocopying posters, drafting the election manifesto, buying beer for other students (buying votes). The "boys" or friends who help in the campaigning process are promised a "package" if the candidate is successful.

Such a "package" would include more beer after the candidate wins, accommodation on campus especially in New Hall, a feat that can be accomplished through the candidate's influence. In order to exhibit their manliness, the candidate and the "boys" usually draft an election manifesto, which is anti-government. The government is the most feared institution as it is capable of using repressive institutional apparatus like the police and the army to silence UBAs. For example in one election manifesto of 1999-2 000, it was noted:

Who will speak if we don't? We must question the rampant corruption, anarchy, idiocy and lunacy of Mugabe's regime and unequivocally denounce those who masquerade as patriots yet causing alarm and despondence.

In student politics at the University of Zimbabwe, it is essential that "real cadres" are opponents and critical of the current government. If a student politician is pro-government and there is a delay in payout release, he cannot call for a demonstration because of his political stance.

## **Masculinity, religion and politics**

The Christian community at the University of Zimbabwe has been very passive in participation in student politics. This community has perceived politics as a rough game, which does not go hand in hand with religious principles. However, the “brothers” in the year 2 000, decided to expand their masculinities from the pulpit by venturing into political activities at the University of Zimbabwe. The participation of church “brothers” in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe has been triggered by the desire to calm down things. The “brothers” are perceived to be some of the “new men” who want peace and will, by any means necessary, avoid demonstrations by students.

The current S.E.C. (2000 – 2001) is headed by a religious president, Dewa Mavhinga. The treasurer, Obert Makore, who won the post of Secretary General, later opted to give up that position and take up another one. Obert Makore argued that the post of Secretary General was too demanding and he could not stand the pressure. Thomas Machinga is also one of the “brothers” in S.E.C. who holds the position of transport coordinator. These “brothers” managed to secure positions in the S.E.C. because they had strong Christian backing. The “brothers” in S.E.C. claim that their aim is to foster a peaceful environment around campus. Thus, they do not want students to be involved in demonstrations. Students’ demonstrations have always been an avenue for expressing masculinity by UBAs.

In this study it was found out that these “brothers” did not give up their positions in church as they entered the political arena. Being in authority in both church and student politics shows their masculinity. The ‘wait and see’ policy adopted by these “brothers” when it comes to calling for demonstrations has been one area of antagonism between the ‘brothers’ and the non religious UBAs who want an ‘active’ S.E.C. The non-religious UBAs who are in the S.E.C. consider their participation in student demonstrations as a ladder to national politics since leading demonstrations renders them visible to the media as ‘cadres’.

Therefore, without demonstrations to challenge governmental policies and to be in solidarity with the masses, as happened when food riots were held in the high density suburbs, their masculinity would not expand beyond the campus gates. In sum, non-religious students consider the participation of religious students in student politics the death knell to student activism.

## **Female participation in student politics**

The rude masculine behavior, which is exhibited by male students (UBAs), especially those who drink alcohol, has forced female students (USAs, members of the University Spinster Association) to take the back seat in student politics. Student politics at the University of Zimbabwe, has largely remained a male dominated field as USAs are constantly eliminated by UBAs from participation in politics through verbal and physical means as indicated in the chapters by Ndlovu and Chagonda in this volume. This shows that the University of Zimbabwe does not uphold principles of democracy.

Table 3 shows the number of male and female students who campaigned for a position in the Student Executive Council in March 2000 elections.

Name of Posts in S.E.C	Number of male Campaigners	Number of female Campaigners	Total
Presidential Posts (2)	4	—	4
Other eight Posts in S.E.C.	26	3	29

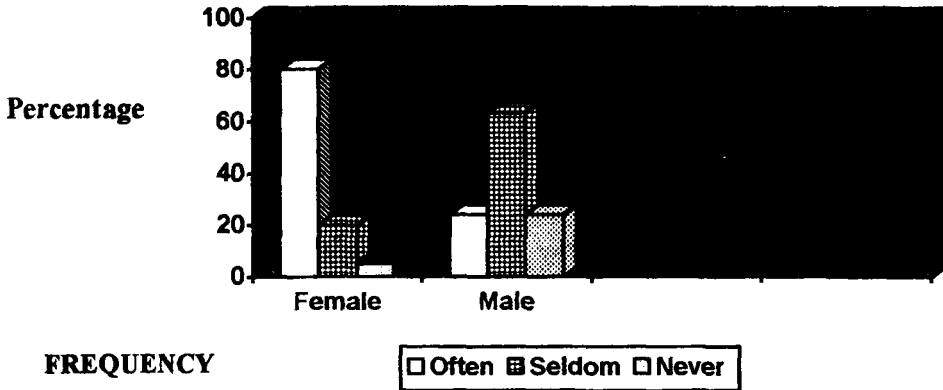
No female student bothered to campaign for the two top posts of President and Vice President of S.E.C. in the March 2000 election. Females campaigned for the other posts such as those of Treasurer, Transport Coordinator and Secretary General, which are considered less tough. However, two of the females who campaigned managed to secure positions in the S.E.C. but their positions, such as that of Secretary General, are of low status.

During interviews, 10 USAs expressed their strong desire to be active in student politics, which is a stepping-stone to national politics. However, many USAs noted that they are doubly marginalized as women and that they face many institutional and social problems in penetrating this male domain. One female student studying for a Bachelor of Science General degree in her 3rd year noted that, she had been made to believe that politics is a dirty game, which only males can manage. The student went on to highlight that she came to the "academic blast furnace", that is the University of Zimbabwe, to obtain a degree and that was her first priority, rather than involvement in politics. Furthermore, of the 15 USAs interviewed, most agreed that their parents had made them believe that politics was a dirty game and they should not be involved in any political activities around campus. However, such a perception has also been extended to some male students especially the "nose brigades" who show their masculinities in the politics of the "wallet", rather than standing in front of 5 000 students, demanding money from a bankrupt government. Therefore, if there are demonstrations for pay out or other pressing issues, USAs either leave campus or lock themselves up in their rooms.

With social pressure from parents and fear, female students' participation in student politics becomes problematic. This then enhances the masculinities of UBAs as they dominate the campus political field, in the same way that men dominate national politics. In this study, it was noted that most USAs cited sexual harassment as the chief deterrent, which forces them not to campaign for office in student politics. The abuse comes in the form of verbal or physical violence. Verbal abuse is the main whip which male politicians (UBAs) use to silence USAs from participating in student politics. USAs noted that if a female tries to campaign for office, male students boo her as they consider politics as a pursuit for males and not suitable for females' participation. Furthermore, one female student studying Politics and Administration in her third year noted that UBAs will call a student woman a "bitch" or a "prostitute"

if she tries to campaign for office in front of other students. This is very humiliating, hence females prefer to take the back seat in student politics.

The frequency of responses citing sexual harassment as a reason for poor participation by female students in politics by gender is shown below.



**Fig.1: Shows female and male students perception of sexual harassment as a reason why females do not participate in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe.**

In addition to verbal and physical harassment, some UBAs have a habit of tearing female candidates' posters around campus, adding moustaches or beards to female posters, writing on the posters that the female student has slept with so many males around campus. One female candidate's poster was defaced and the following words written on it

"You are trying too hard to be a man, but you don't possess it".

Females noted that, given the fact that the University of Zimbabwe is a masculine institution as it is headed and staffed mostly by males, it is difficult to articulate issues of sexual harassment of female students by male students particularly the politicians with violent friends. The unruly behavior of UBAs in relation to sexual harassment usually goes unsanctioned or it receives minor punishment, which in turn, discourages reporting of such issues to those in the corridors of power. Ndlovu, in this volume, cites the examples of the female student who was verbally violated by a UBA who had stolen her keys with the intention to burgle her room. On reporting the theft, the female student was advised by a warden to accept an apology from the UBA rather than have him taken to a disciplinary hearing.

However, male students interviewed noted that female students (USAs) have been socialized in such a way that they are "politically shy". They cannot "adumbrate" in front of other students. The "adumbration" process entails that one speaks in public with the appropriate political jargon and that one must not seem to think about what

s/he is saying. When speaking in public, the student should be fluent and confident. Furthermore, the "adumbration" process might even go to the extent of naming parts of the anatomy or ridiculing the current government. For example, one male student in his campaign used to say,

"We must erect like it (penis) and fight the uncertain and erratic government policy in student funding".

In sum, most females (USAs) cannot go to the extremes of naming parts of the anatomy in front of other students. Therefore, this explains why USAs take the back seat in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe.

## **Disability and masculinity**

In Zimbabwe, the disability paradigm has shifted slightly from one of social exclusion to various degrees of inclusion as disabled people, especially men, now face less collective institutional discrimination in various social settings. Disability refers to "the disadvantage or restriction caused by contemporary social organization which takes no or little account of people who have impairments and excludes them from the mainstream of social activities" (Oliver and Barnes 1998:17). At the University of Zimbabwe, the dichotomous approach of able bodied man versus disabled man, is slowing decomposing, paving the way for building an egalitarian society which upholds the principles of democracy. Disabled male UBAs at the University of Zimbabwe can now participate in various social, economic and political activities, such as some sport, religious and other activities, which were considered out of bounds for them in the past. However, the level of participation in student politics at the University of Zimbabwe by disabled students remains minimal due to many different factors.

The political field at the University of Zimbabwe has been dominated by men, but these males are usually able bodied. The domination of able-bodied men (UBAs) in student politics shows that they exhibit hegemonic masculinities, as they are the ones in the corridors of student power. The visually impaired UBAs have usually attended boarding schools run by government and the physically disabled have usually attended some local authority schools. Therefore, the disabled male students also fall in the category of "SRBs" and "born locations", but their participation in student politics is minimal unlike other UBAs in the same classes.

The disabled students or "golden boys" are perceived to possess subordinate forms of masculinities in student politics, as they do not participate in union activities with much zeal. The term "golden boys" is not well known around campus, but, for one blind male student studying for a Bachelor of Arts (General), it meant that they are a class of their own as they constantly receive special attention from other students who feel sorry for them. However, the student went on to note that, such special attention usually undermines their masculinity and participation in student politics, as they are considered 'harmless'. The student has this to say:

"If you are constantly helped by other "men" and women on a daily basis, then you are not man enough to stand on your own. How then, can you champion the causes of other students in politics?"

In sum, most disabled UBAs are perceived to possess "sissy" forms of masculinity as highlighted by Dubbert (1979:34). The disabled UBAs feel that they lack the traits of "proper men" such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, mischievousness or notoriety. Disabled UBAs think that in the eyes of most students, this lack of 'harmful' characteristics renders them harmless, innocent people who are "unmanly".

During early childhood socialization, these "golden boys" have been made to believe that disability is a form of sickness, which exempts them from participation in social activities. Therefore, despite "being men" they feel that they are not "man enough" to participate in student politics with gusto like other UBAs.

"What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve about" (Old English Proverb).

But this is not so for Joe. In a rare case, if not the first of its type, a partially blind male student whom I shall call Joe, studying for a Bachelor of Law, campaigned for political office in the students' union. This UBA had sought masculine 'achievement' through the core masculine behavior at the University of Zimbabwe, running for office in the union. Joe, who is partially blind, drinks alcohol, an act closely linked to the dominant masculine behavior of the youth culture at the University of Zimbabwe. In the youth culture at the University of Zimbabwe, drinking alcohol is one of the activities indulged in by "real men" or real "UBAs". Drinking alcohol is supposed to empower a UBA to indulge in masculine behavior that cannot easily be sanctioned by institutional regulations. Joe campaigned for office like other UBAs, but did not manage to get elected into any position. He argued that some of his friends had not turned out to vote for him as they thought his campaign was the joke of the new millennium. Despite the failure to get elected, Joe had the courage of a man and his aspirations to hegemonic campus masculinity, were not extinguished by disability.

## **The rewards of hegemonic masculinity**

Student politicians benefit from their election into the SEC. They get free meals from the union and are able to stay in university residences to organize students' activities. They can also influence the selection of their friends into committees through which these friends secure accommodation on campus. Accommodation on campus is prized because it enables a male student to avoid parental control over the consumption of alcohol. It gives the student control over time that may be deployed in clubbing and carousing, sexual activity and study. In lodgings, male students are forced to perform domestic chores in the common areas. A student with campus accommodation can also accommodate 'squatters', usually friends who have no accommodation on campus. The perception that a real UBA should not always be moral and abide by institutional regulations rationalizes the

accommodation of 'squatters' thus building up of a following which is politically useful if a UBA intends to run for political office. Thus, participation in student politics is a means of survival and a way of dealing with the 'stomach.'

This thinking has rationalized the looting of students' funds by student representatives.

According to Varsity Times (2000: 1) Vision (2001:6) and Campus (2000: 5) four members of S.E.C. and one from the Student Representative Assembly (S.R.A) were suspended after looting about \$43 000 in separate incidents in July 2000. The money was looted from first year subscriptions, to the Student Union. Looting has been a traditional way for UBAs to exhibit their masculinities, reward friends and political allies and build up a following. Furthermore, looting is considered part of payment for the vigorous campaign mounted by the winner and his 'boys'. Therefore, it is a prize for a successful UBAs' "political honeymoon". However, the looting of huge sums of money has been intensified by the economic hardships, which students are currently facing. The religious leaders in the S.E.C. thought that this was not a proper way of expressing masculinity. The 2 000 looting in the union was unearthed with their help. Without these "brothers" in S.E.C., the scandal could have not been unearthed. This demonstrates the contradictions in the various masculinities that are exhibited by UBAs around campus. The non-religious UBAs consider the religious UBAs to be exhibiting "sissy" masculinity, as the 'brothers' are scared to act in a way that a 'real' man should. The religious S.E.C. has also condemned the looting accusations leveled against the Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor and the Dean of Students. In one student circular it was noted that:

George BALD BRAINED "CURTAIN" Madzima (suspended UZ Dean of Students) tells us that curtains cost \$11 million while the library has no books. University graduates are computer illiterate while Executive Deans ride in poshy (*sic*) Peugeot's but Hill (the Vice-Chancellor) in cahoots with Nyagura (the Pro Vice Chancellor) supported by bald brained Madzima vomit that the University is concentrating on core activities. Is looting, maladministration and corruption part of the so called core activities?

Students, on the allegation that university officials set bad precedent for students, have criticized the alleged looting scandals of those in the corridors of power. Furthermore, students have asked questions as to how the males in the echelons of power at the university can discipline students who loot funds yet the authorities are themselves alleged to be involved in the looting of university resources.

## The need for identity

Student politics at the University of Zimbabwe provides one avenue for students to establish identities. In other words it provides a path for a student to be popular around campus as a fearless man. A fearless man is not scared of the repressive state and institutional apparatus. Given that at least three UZ student politicians are now members of parliament, the incentive to participate in student politics is

greater than ever before. The desire to be noticed by the national media as a “real cadre” has provided the incentives for some UBAs to pursue these forms of troubled masculinity. In their former schools, some UBAs were popular, but at the University of Zimbabwe, that is not always possible as the institution is so large. This forces UBAs to pursue these extreme and troubled masculinities so that they can easily enter into national politics. In sum, the need to be known has forced some UBAs to do anything to get a position in Student Executive Council.

### **Lack of measures to deal with troubled masculinities**

The University of Zimbabwe does not have the appropriate measures to deal with forms of masculinities exhibited by UBAs, which impinge on democratic rights of other students, especially female students. Student politics is one avenue in which issues of sexual harassment have come to light as male politicians try to silence female politicians so that student politics remains a male domain. The University of Zimbabwe does not have the necessary channels to deal with issues of sexual harassment and this actually perpetuates the prevalence of troubled masculinities at the University of Zimbabwe. The intimidation of potential witnesses by UBA and their solidarity against women and against the university authorities renders the enforcement of regulations weak. As indicated by Ndlovu in this volume, even the officials of the university do not want to confront the UBAs and the students' executives over the behavior of the UBA. Democracy is still a long way away for many students who are excluded from political participation in predominantly male institutions such as the University of Zimbabwe.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The dominant masculine behaviors exhibited by male students in politics show a lot of negativism, which has pushed masculinity at the University of Zimbabwe into trouble. For some UBAs, it is the desire to conform to the masculine campus culture, which predisposes them to behaving like “wild” men. The ‘SRB’ and ‘Born Location’ men are the major carriers of the dominant masculinity. ‘Nose brigade’ men do not participate significantly in campus politics. Furthermore, there is more social freedom at the University of Zimbabwe, which is not sanctioned by regulations. In addition to the above, most disciplinary regulations are not enforced by the institution to build more positive forms of being manly. Female students are constrained from participating actively in campus politics through verbal and physical harassment. The response by female students to withdraw from student politics actually strengthens the power base of young male undergraduate ‘wild’ students. Lack of participation by disabled students in student politics actually allows the dominant masculinities to prevail over the subordinate forms. Therefore disabled men and females should challenge these forms of masculinity. Religious men appear to have a ‘softer’ and more morally upright masculinity, which eschews theft from student coffers. Despite the presence of common characteristics amongst most

undergraduate males, their masculinities are different. The dominant masculinities of 'wild' men are more aggressive and more intolerant than those of the religious males and those student males with disabilities.

The University of Zimbabwe should develop mechanisms to deal with issues of sexual harassment of female student politicians by males. The SEC and the university authorities should take such issues seriously and make sure that the culprits are brought to book and should receive reasonable punishment. There should be specially trained officers in the Department of Student Affairs to deal with the handling of grievances and gender-based problems between students. A male and a female officer would be appropriate for there are issues around which female students find difficulty in confiding to male officers and vice versa. Through such mechanisms, female participation in the masculine student politics would be increased.

Furthermore, ordinance 30, which prohibits fighting at the University of Zimbabwe, should be extended to issues of sexual harassment. This would enhance gender democracy, equity and human rights at the University of Zimbabwe and the cultivation of more positive masculinities.

The disabled students should have their own elections through the Disabled Center so as to choose leaders who will champion their causes in the Student Executive Council. Alternatively, there should be a quota system to allow the representation of disabled students and females so that they can champion their causes in the Student Executive Council. The quota system would make student politics less masculine. In addition to the above, this would also reduce the negative masculinities being exhibited by UBAs and there would be better possibilities for the birth of "new men" who are less aggressive and more tolerant of differences.

During student election time, the University of Zimbabwe administration should increase the patrols of security personnel so as to reduce incidents of intimidation of other student politicians. Those students found defacing other students' posters should be barred from running for elections or participating in elections in any capacity.

In order to reduce incidents of looting of funds by male student leaders in the Student Executive Council, there should be constant auditing of books. This would reduce those masculinities, which find expression in the looting of funds in the Student Executive Council.

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