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Address to Staff, Students and Guests of the NWU on the Book Launch of *Macho Men in South African Gyms: The Idealization of Spornosexuality* (Rothmann, J: 2022)

Prof RJ Balfour, DVC Teaching and Learning, NWU

Title: At the intersections: the body, identity and gym

The onset of the Stonewall demonstrations (or riots as they have sometimes been referred to in the literature since the 1970s and 1980s) and the first arrest of an Australian man in the 1970s at a pride event, signalled social change inasmuch as it signalled also a refusal of communities of sexualities-diverse people to remain unseen, and to accept continued state-endorsed violence and marginalisation. Granted; a wave of feminist research, and the civil rights movement created conditions under which leadership could be formed, expressed and identified society and in the popular media, lending more than simply a carnivalesque quality to the riot of sexual diversity, and ascribing to it, albeit with time, a host of epithets (protests, demonstrations, activism and civil action) in which a crowd was lead, and leaders were formed, in the crush and violation of bodies by other bodies.

A generation of lgbtqa+ activists across the globe arose, not only in the global North, but also elsewhere, in the decades that followed Stonewall (consider in the 1980s for example, South Africans such as Justice Edwin Cameron, Beverley Palesa Ditsie, Simon Nkoli and Zachie Achmat, amongst others). In the 1980s and in the context of centuries long rejection of non-conforming bodies with the wreckage of neglect and disease attendant to it, leadership in the lgbtqa+ community emerged is the context of the rejection of violence against bodies. Damage to and disfigurement of the body characterises the literature of the AIDS years: monstrous desire and the monstrous body have long also come together in popular fiction from *Beauty and the Beast* and *Frankenstein* to the *Incredible Hulk*. Not only had some freakish value always lead to the hyper-realisation of the body, but unsurprisingly, the freaks of nature were either animalised, engineered or simply coloured (green in the case of the Hulk or Shrek). Base desires, base values, base behaviours: the body out of control. Control and power, are of course, social

Nowadays it is heartening to see that many of our leaders in the lgbtqa+ community have gone on to lead prominently also in industry and politics, and conversely that icons of heterosexual leadership (consider Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and President Nelson Mandela) have made inclusion and acceptance as basis for a definition of leadership beyond a narrow definition of sexual orientation (consider abroad for example, Australian Senator Penny Wong, or British born entrepreneur, Lord Brown). Body culture remains prevalent especially in the areas of sport the primary common sites of development of which are gyms, even if body-culture is not mainstreamed in the discourses around achievement and leadership in society. The *Australian 2020 Outstanding 50 LGBTIQ+ Leaders Report* produced by Deloitte describes individuals whose prominence in Australian society, is premised in part on their own histories of diversity, as much as on their achievements.

Accounts like these are evocative of the past and provocative in relation to questions about inclusion and leadership, social justice and decolonisation: such reports draw from an international discourse concerning social justice, gender and culture and from older works, coming from psychology and queer studies (for example, Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands* (1987), Downs' *The Velvet Rage* (2005) and Weeks' *The World We Have Won* (2007). A reading of these (one about the body and identity, another drawn from counselling psychology and the third from cultural studies) as well as other accounts, features common characteristics: awareness of shame, experience of adversity, courage, compassion, passion and example as seen in the Deloitte report. There are of course, other kinds of history: the distorted exemplars of lives in which gender and sexuality were sublimated/ distorted (as ably documented by the Lemmey and Miller, 2022, volume on *Bad Gays: a homosexual history*). The development of leadership, whether instrumentalised as part of the public imaginary of the 'exemplary gay', or not, bears reflection in terms of what has emerged, also since the 1960s, as the field of inclusive education, referring initially to education of, with and for the differently abled, to education for diversity in which disability also features alongside sexuality (consider the analysis offered by Roberson & Perry, 2021). Interestingly Unicef (2022) refers to inclusive education as education for all "who have traditionally been excluded – not only children with disabilities, but speakers of minority languages too". Sexuality, gender, the disability of the body as well as its functions (mind, limbs, speech), multilingualism, and class difference come to be regarded as elements of education inclusion, and inevitably have implications for debates concerning decoloniality and the curriculum as a means to transform society and its future. Common to these many definitions and perspectives offered on identity, is the body, and the ways in which the body becomes the site on which identity, and its development is formed and performed. There is a literature about the development of body and identity: consider for example Lesko's two books *Act Your Age: a cultural construction of Adolescence* (2001) and *Masculinities at School* (1999) in which the relationship between body, the sites in which it is embodied, are described in ways that co-construct both the world and the body: each configuring the other in a complex interplay between socialisation, physical growth, matter, and the development of identity. Gym as spaces are similarly co-constructed sites in which the body and identity are formed: rules are developed that reflect social attitudes to discipline, self-worth, heteronormative ideals and the counter-ideals that serve to contest or undermine these. Importantly the gym as a site is devoted seemingly to the body: its regulation, formation, and ultimately affirmation as subject to the ideals of shape, form, and health. The body as representative of sexual health and prowess is particularly focussed on in ways that suggest an underlying value system that is both socially derivative and socially counter-intuitive. The obvious concern self-discipline, and continence: that capacity to keep it together, to hold it together and to hold yourself in, becomes the hyper-representation of the subjection of the body, to the mind's ideal of form and shape. The counter values verge on sinful: gluttony, the absence of restraint, greed as the distortion of desire, body junk the distortion of lust, body shaming as the judgement of having let the body go, have it all hang-out. Consider the sporno body as evidence of austerity dieting, excessive and dangerous exercising, as suggestive of values like discipline, restraint, self-love versus the counter values, rebellion, lust, avarice and rebellion against the natural order of nature and society. The counter-values are not necessarily references to another less ideal body, but can in fact be contained within the same bodies linked to a range of associated disorders eating and exercise disorders. And then, more closely aligned to Mark Simpson's original coining of the term, is the relationship between the ideals the sporting body and pornographic body as the idealised version of the sexualised body. And it is here, I would guess, that the scholarship on masculinities becomes important. Simpson may have coined the term with respect to men, but there is an entire industry and competitive world devoted to women and women's gym bodies and it is debatable whether the eroticisation of body-tone is the

subject of a predominantly male gaze (consider the body competitions for women the world over as facilitated through the *Muscle and Model World Alliance*).

In welcoming you to this event it is timely thus that a scholarly account of the development and understanding of the phenomenon of spornosexuality, becomes available to us, and we are delighted as NWU to have supported this scholarly work towards publication, and thrilled that its occurrence is led by one of our own colleagues at the NWU, Professor Jacques Rothmann. Jacques and I have known each other for twelve years, and it was in 2011 that we were requested by the University's Transformation Advisor, to offer a workshop together to the student as well as university leadership on gender and sexuality in the workplace. Invitations went out to that leadership from the Vice Chancellor's Office, but on the day not one leader in that audience was a university manager. A table had been set, a room had been prepared, but the guests were rank and file University staff: a signal then of the readiness of the institution to confront, understand and accept the wave of change that had occurred elsewhere in the world since the early 1970s. Much has changed for the better in the last 10 years at the NWU, and it is now more than then, a place where such work becomes possible to not only nurture, but also to recognise and celebrate: the reason why we are all here today. On that note I would like to extend a special and warm welcome to:

- a) Prof Jacques Rothmann the author of the book being launched today,
- b) Jarryd Nurden
- c) Prof Rory Magrath
- d) Prof Anthony Brown
- e) Claudia Howard (Slamdill),
- f) the MC, Prof Werner Nell,
- g) Professors Mirna Nel and Mpho Chaka and Aaron Tshidzumba the Deputy Deans of the Faculty of Humanities.
- h) Professor Dumi Moyo, the Executive Dean, and Directors of research entities and the schools of the Faculty;
- i) Colleagues, and students of the NWU thank you for supporting this event with your presence;
- j) Guests of the University and Faculty specially invited to be present.

Thank you.

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