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Maintenance and changing masculinities as sources of gender conflict in contemporay (sic) Johannesburg.

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2008-03-11T13:31:43Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/4651

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to understand the nature of the state and its relationship with its citizens. It explores this question through the study of one of the state's institutions – the maintenance system; its conception of gender identities and relationships is examined. Through a close analysis of this system, and its effects on men and women, the thesis explores the making of contemporary gender identities in South Africa. The study also pays particular attention to current conceptions of what it means to be a man.

The study examines men's views of maintenance laws as they experience it, with a focus on the differing conceptions of fatherhood held by a range of men, and how they relate to hegemonic conceptions of masculinity espoused by the maintenance system. The study also looks at how these hegemonic understandings of masculinity limit the chances for men to be 'successful' fathers and fulfilled persons.

The central premise of this thesis is that masculinity exists outside the realms of the natural and biological. Rather, it asserts that masculinity is embodied in social relations, which are constantly changing and are context-bound. Naturalised definitions of masculinity are limiting to fathers in a social, political and economic context which is shifting. This study is driven by the question: what options and alternatives are available to men and fathers with regards to role formation, especially in their interaction with the maintenance system and their relationships with their children?