

# Mr Paul: Masculinity and Paul's self-presentation (1 Cor 11–13)



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Notwithstanding all the corporeal and gendered language in the Pauline letters, the apostle's bodiliness and masculinity so far has received little attention. In the 1st-century context masculinity reigned by default and provides the contemporary context for teasing out the corporeal and gendered overtones in the Pauline letters, especially in Paul's self-presentation. Recent and intersecting masculinity studies, body theology and queer theory provide useful tools for engaging Paul as man and his bodily-focused, gendered approach in his letters. A focus on both Paul as embodied man and his corporeal, gendered approach enable alternative readings of his letters' concern with corporeality and the related relationships between bodies, power and life in the communities he addressed.

## Introducing the issue

The apostle Paul has been studied from many different angles, analysed and discussed for being, among others, a Jew (e.g. Sanders 1983; Stendahl 1976), Pharisee (e.g. Young 1997), rabbi (e.g. Chilton 2004), prophet (e.g. Merklein 1992; Sandnes 1991), apostle (e.g. White 1999), theologian (e.g. Beker 1980), thinker (e.g. Keck 1993), traveller and author (e.g. Stirewalt 2003). One of the most complicated aspects of Pauline research, and neglected until recently, concerns the interpretation of Paul's letters with regard to issues of body and gender.<sup>1</sup> Excluding a few exceptions, though, his gender has mostly been addressed in conjunction with other issues, if at all (e.g. absent as a theme from Malina & Neyrey 1996; Neyrey 1990). In fact, while Paul has traditionally become an invisible man, his letters claim his status as not merely a human being but a male; not speaking 'as a human being *simpliciter*' but 'in the name of masculinity'<sup>2</sup> (Clines 2003:181–192).

The challenge of coming to terms with the gendered Paul is no mean feat – not because of a deficit of indications in the letters, but because of pervasive gender concerns and notions, not unlike what was found at the time. His letters are steeped in gendered rhetoric, yet distinctions become blurry in Christ (Gl 3:28) and in specific bodies (1 Cor 15). The letters engage – if not revel – in stock and also reinvented masculine characteristics as is apparent in the more autobiographical sections (e.g. 2 Cor 10–13; Gl 1–2) as well as in the tenor and appeal of the letters generally. However, configuring masculinity at the same time was often complex and went beyond such categories – a trend also present in the Pauline documents. Paul is presented as the father of communities (e.g. 1 Cor 4:14, 15; 2 Cor 11:2; 12:14; 1 Th 2:11), warrior (e.g. 2 Cor 10:3–5) and victorious athlete (e.g. 1 Cor 9:24–27) with all the hierarchical and patriarchal power it implied. Nevertheless, Paul also announced himself as a slave of Christ (Gl 1:10; Rm 1:1) and even slave of all (1 Cor 9:19–23) or, as he did in many of his letters, as a brother of fellow Jesus-followers (in Galatians alone, see e.g. 1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18). Also in style of presentation, Paul could present a disciplined diatribe argument (as found in the letter to the Romans, see chapters 1–11), but at times apparently lost rhetorical control (as in Galatians, see 5:12). Clearly masculinity was not simply about exercising power or the ability to do so, but manly power and control over others was matched by self-discipline. Careful consideration of Paul's socio-historical context from the perspective of masculinity studies is therefore imperative.<sup>3</sup>

1. Mayordomo Marín (2006:2, borrowing from Leutzsch) provides a handy taxonomy of how masculinity in early Christianity has been investigated to date by looking how individual figures in the New Testament, also Jesus Christ and God, have been characterised as male and also how texts construct or implicitly frame ideas about masculinity.

2. This is a troubling, or at least, an ambiguous notion for Clines (2003:192). See Kuefler's statement (2001:1) 'The problem with men's history is that there is too much of it' that refers to the dominance of the male perspective in the literature of the time. However, given that masculinity 'formed an integral part of the intellectual life of late antiquity and was crucial in the development of Christian ideology' (Kuefler 2001:1), the theme bears further reflection.

3. For development of masculinity studies and suggestions for understanding its relationship with gender studies, see for example Mayordomo Marín (2006:2) and Moore (2003:1–22).

**Note:** This article is submitted in honour of the rich contribution Fika Janse van Rensburg made to the study of the New Testament in South Africa over many decades, and for his inspiration, commitment and concern for responsible study of the New Testament in its socio-historical context.

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Studies on corporeality, sexuality and gender have mushroomed during the last two decades in particular, supported by interpretations of the work of scholars such as Foucault (1978) as well as studies on gender and sexuality by scholars such as Butler (1990), Sedgwick (1993) and others.<sup>4</sup> Masculinity studies developed out of the broader area of gender studies that again is a further development of, especially, American women's gay and lesbian studies of the 1960's and 1970's. Feminism was the main driving force behind these ensuing critical discourses that were driven as much by resentment as by affirmation. While feminist studies criticised supposed natural categories of male and female, subsequent gender studies interrogated society's construction and delineation of the whole range of gender categories, including male and female, but now also masculine and feminine, straight and gay, et cetera. As in feminism, gender studies acknowledged that biology cannot be equated with destiny, but that gender roles are societal power relations with strong historical development and often are masked by the term *natural*.

My investigation here treats the ancient construction of masculinity as ideological in the sense of being 'a system of meaning that served particular political interests and supported a particular, contingent structure of the exercise of power' (Martin 2001:106). As will be argued, ancient construction of masculinity was marked by contradictions that did not weaken but often served to strengthen the ideology – as is also evident in the Pauline letters.<sup>5</sup> The discussion is to some degree informed by another question: To what extent is the paradox of contemporary masculinity studies, 'the rhetoric of threatened and instable masculinity' amidst 'stable and continuous male power' (Conway 2008:11) already also present in New Testament documents?<sup>6</sup>

## 1st century masculinity as context<sup>7</sup>

In the 1st century context masculinity reigned by default and forms the contemporary context for teasing out the corporeal and gendered overtones in Paul, especially in his self-presentation. Most, if not all, scholars of antiquity agree on one aspect when it comes to issues of body, sex and gender, namely honouring plurality is more appropriate than the postulation of some single universal and monolithic understanding of human bodies, sex and gender. No single norm of masculinity prevailed throughout the empire – the

4. However, the use of the insights of Foucault and others in classical studies broadly speaking requires further attention. As Moore (2003:20–22) warns, 'To appropriate the Foucauldian "legacy" in classics, then, is run the risk of depoliticizing and domesticating it.'

5. Compare Martin (2001:106) on how internal contradictions of ideological systems rather than weaken the system actually bolster and improve its coherence. Internal contradictions relieve the stress on the dominant ideological structure and flexible ideologies are strong ideologies.

6. The focus of this article is on the authentic Pauline letters and on their rhetorical and ideological structuring of masculinity. The discussion therefore does not include the deuterio-Pauline letters or Acts, nor is it an attempt to get to the individual psychology of the author or, for that matter, of the historical Paul.

7. Various important studies on 1st-century masculinity are cited in the source list. A helpful inventory of differences with modern times include the notion of a single-sex body, masculinity as social performativity, activeness, the link between masculinity and virtue, self-mastery, adolescence as crucial formative stage for masculinity, and the association of public and private space with men and women respectively (Mayordomo Marin 2006:4–8).

ubiquitous socio-political context of the day. In fact, gender itself was not a given, because some people were considered not to even have gender. Male slaves, defeated enemies and barbarians were seen as lacking *ἀνδρεία* (Greek) or *virtus* (Latin), viz. manliness<sup>8</sup> (Ivarsson 2007:165–166; cf. McDonnell 2006). Slaves were without gender, and its defining characteristics, expectations and claims upon honour, status, rights and protection were ruled out. Female and child slaves were most vulnerable and slaves – male female or child – at any rate did not have sexual privacy or control over their bodies<sup>9</sup> (Osiek & Pouya 2010:47–48).

Gender in ancient times was plotted on a grid where cosmic hierarchy and control of desire intersected (Osiek & Pouya 2010:45). In modern times sex and gender came to be related to physiological and social categories respectively, and accorded a sequential order: dichotomous, biological terms define male and female sexes. Gender is then understood as the societal identities and patterns originating from a particular sex that was understood as a natural and essential quality (Boyarin 1998:117; cf. Butler 1990:146). This gender-construction has often been presented as natural, normative and even divinely ordained, especially in terms of an ostensible complementarity of the sexes, and served the interests of the powerful.<sup>10</sup> The 1st century world, for starters, was predicated on a one body model, defined essentially in male terms with the female body as derivative and inferior.<sup>11</sup> In an incipient Christian environment, texts such as the Gospel of Thomas 114 define humankind in male terms and made masculinity the goal to be achieved and determinative of salvation.<sup>12</sup> It means that masculinity did not result from a virulent misogyny; masculine prerogative did not arise from an anti-women stance, but rather the opposite. Simply put, the cultural setting of the time privileged masculinity and assigned gender and social roles accordingly.<sup>13</sup> Maleness in the first-century world generally and the Roman culture in particular was more than biological.

8. Roman manliness, or the kind of manliness ancient Romans meant by the Latin word *virtus*, turns out to have little to do with the qualities and activities – sexually aggressive display and behavior, fathering of children, support and protection of family – commonly associated with manliness in Mediterranean as well as other cultures' (McDonnell 2006:xiii).

9. At a broader level, Orlando Patterson (1982:13) described slavery as social death, since 'slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons'. Slaves' lack of ascribed gender fits into their socially alienated status.

10. All things, it is argued, in ways we cannot always fully apprehend, are what they are in terms of the balance of opposites. These opposites, moreover, exist in a perpetual tension resulting from the fact that they are also, on some fundamental level, similar, and thus complementary' (Holben 1999:56).

11. 'The female is less perfect than the male for one, principal reason because she is colder ... A second reason is one that appears in dissecting ... All the parts, then, that men have, women have too, the difference between them lying in only one thing, which must be kept in mind throughout the discussion, namely, that in women the parts are within [*the body*], whereas in men they are outside, in the region called the perineum. ... In fact, you could not find a single male part left over that had not simply changed its position; for the parts that are inside in woman are outside in man' (Galen, *On the use of the Parts*, 14.6–7).

12. Gospel of Thomas 114: 'Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven.'" Roman women who resisted traditional roles and furthered their own sense of identity and who were not dependent on a male figure were deemed to attempt to become men (cf. Winter 2003 on shifts in social roles of 1st century Roman women).

13. Amidst recognition for both the greater social visibility of women and the commensurate bigger role in socio-economic affairs during the 1st century CE, the question is to what extent their communities and society at large allowed such perceptions and roles beyond masculinity. In other words, to what extent were women who were allowed such roles measured by a masculine yardstick, and in word and deed judged not only by their ability to fulfil male-defined roles, but roles that were inscribed in masculine perceptions?

The physical body replicated social structuring, in the sense that 'control over bodies mirror social control mechanisms in society' (Neyrey 1986:131).<sup>14</sup>

Scholars often assemble a range of typical characteristics in order to plot 1st century masculinity – using such taxonomies as a grid or framework for evaluating specific men. Biblical scholars suggest that masculinity in biblical texts are characterised also by cross-cultural notions such as strength, violence, powerful and persuasive speech, male bonding and womanlessness<sup>15</sup> (e.g. Clines 2003:181–182). Such categories are helpful as long as they are not used as tick boxes of static achievements, but seen as goals that constantly had to be achieved. Culture specific characteristics in the 1st century Mediterranean world revolve around notions of honour and shame. Masculinity depended on the ability of men to live up to expectations and to prove their masculinity – most often in competition with other men (Osiek & Pouya 2010:45–46).<sup>16</sup> '[A]ncient masculinity was constituted more by the shape of one's life than by the shape of one's body' (Conway 2008:16). Like the body, at the time gender also existed on a single spectrum and was therefore inherently unstable.<sup>17</sup> Maleness was always valued while effeminacy had to be avoided. Therefore, being a woman was the last thing 1st century men aspired to (Osiek & Pouya 2010:46). Masculinity was not derived as much as acquired: maleness may at times be informed by biology, but it was not determined by a body. 'Manliness was not a birthright. It was something that had to be won' (Gleason 1995:159), viz. masculinity required actions that would inscribe it (Swanutt 2004:55). First-century males avoided gender slippage through accepting these culturally determined gender behaviour and roles.

Masculinity was therefore also deeply ambivalent. As much as the hierarchically-informed, control-based construction of masculinity in the 1st century world *seemed* consistent, monolithic and ideologically secured, it was not (Martin 2001:81). Not only was both sexual prowess and sexual

control used to define masculinity, but many other contrasting notions were interchangeably used in this regard. Furthermore, modern, heterosexist assumptions about a natural pairing of male and female superimposed onto the concept of masculinity displace the pairing of mastery rather than the heterosexual dyad with virility or manliness of men. According to duBois (2003):

One strain of ancient thinking would regard as most masculine a man who dominated sexually boys, or other men, rather than one who consorted with women, who could have a debilitating, even effeminizing effect. (p. 321)

Sexual prowess as well as the other side of the coin, namely control over sexual desire, constituted an important, if not the only, gridline on which masculinity was plotted. Males were not to become vulnerable or to be passive or acted upon in sexual activity as they were 'impenetrable penetrators' (Conway 2008).<sup>18</sup>

Masculinity in the 1st century was ambiguous with men at times and ideologically portrayed (idolized?) as 'ascetic inseminators' and 'menstruating men' (Martin 2001:81–108).<sup>19</sup> In what Martin (2001) calls the conglomerate of Greco-Roman culture, masculinity was characterised by ambiguity and contradictions that ironically ensured the efficiency of the ideological system of masculinity. Given that sex was 'permissible but precarious' in ancient times (Martin 2001:89) its ability to vet masculinity was compromised. Even if sexual engagements as much as their avoidance served different cultic and social purposes, attempts at exercising sexual control were found over a wide range of social locations. Insofar as the ability to penetrate and impregnate was what constituted a man, so too did avoiding sexual intercourse also define masculinity.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand generation was a male prerogative, while at the same time the avoidance or at least control over sexual intercourse was equally a particular manly trait.<sup>21</sup>

14.To explain such social mechanisms, Douglas (1996:57–71) constructs a group-grid model, where group refers to the degree of pressure exerted on a social unit to conform to social norms for order and control, and grid refers to degree of individuals' agreement with, in the sense of perception and valuation of, socially defined norms, definitions and classifications. Amidst widespread appreciation for Douglas' work, which is too vast to reference here, questions were raised about her tendency to homogenise the communities in which she worked and to understand them as united entities as well as to overlook the ideological settings of texts she investigated.

15.Surveying the field, Moore (2003:7) identifies David Clines as the biblical scholar who, at the time, has published most on the intersection of Bible and masculinity studies. Finer differences or qualifications among 1st century people in perceptions about masculinity should not be ignored. However, given a largely shared socio-historical context as well as the ubiquity of the Roman Empire and its values and a lingering, pervasive Hellenism, gender norms and values in Jewish communities did not differ vastly. Clines' work, where he derives his categories from the work he did on the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and its social setting and uses these categories for studying Paul, supports this position.

16.One might be born a male (Greek *arsēn*; Latin *mas*) or a human (*anthrōpos*, *homo*) and still not be a man (*anēr*, *vir*); one could only become a *vir* by energetically seeking honor, which was seen as a moral quality, denoting virtue and courage' (Osiek & Pouya 2010:45–46; cf. Smit 2012).

17.As much as masculinity has always been an indication on a broader human gender or sex spectrum, its 1st century form did not allow for exhibiting what may have been perceived as femininity. Avoiding a feminine or effeminate appearance meant that discipline, self-control, military skill, good looks, modesty in dress and behaviour, intellectual growth, justified anger and being seen as 'active' were promoted among men in favour of a masculine form. 'Masculinity and femininity were located on two different poles of a spectrum, which inscribes the interrelation of masculinity or femininity as superior/inferior, societal status as more/less powerful, and sex role as penetrator/penetrated' (Osiek & Pouya 2010:45).

18.Men were to display domination sexually and through the ability to produce offspring, but men were not to show a lack of control by becoming sexually too active. Self-mastery, which included control over a variety of matters such as greed, anger, self-indulgence and also sexual desire, was seen as a particularly male trait, and dependent upon reason. Josephus' description of the Essenes in *Life, Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Judaean War* portrays them (Essenes) as model of excellence. His praise of the Essenes rests on a rhetoric of masculinity that in turn focuses on a high degree of self-control.

19.Conway (2008:21–29) points to the ambiguity in the generativity and sexual restraint tension, and also in the portrayal of anger at times as feminine (loss of control), but at other times as masculinity (raising the body temperature).

20.On the one hand, for example, measures to prevent singers from engaging in sex by preventing erection through the insertion of a fibula in the foreskin (Celsus, *De medicina* 7.25.2; Martial, *Epigrams* 7.82.1; 11.75.8; 14.215.2; Juvenal, *Satires* 6.379; *Priapea* 77.17) were believed to preserve their high pitched voices as they were prevented from becoming men. On the other hand, various notions of the dangers of infatuation (cf. Columella, *On agriculture* 11.1.4; 12.4.3; 7.12.11 who lists sexual self-control as prerequisite for farm managers, prohibit sexual intercourse for those involved in preparing food, and sees sexual intercourse as even weakening dogs' strength) and the numerous examples of antaphrodisiacs (animal parts such as hippopotamus forehead – Pliny, *Natural History* 27.42.65; 28.31.121; snails, pigeon dung drunk with oil and wine, fighting cocks' testicles – Pliny, *Natural History* 30.49.141–143; 30.53.148; 34.50.166) all attest to the extent to which intercourse was avoided (cf. Martin 2001:84–87).

21.As much as various ancient authors related the male generative function to the power of male semen as opposed to the lack of or ineffectual semen of women (e.g. Galen, *On Semen* 1.7.5; Soranus *Gynecology* 1.9.34), they also believed that, unlike women, males could exercise sexual control that was necessary for health reasons, either by avoiding intercourse (e.g. Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.7.30) or moderating sexual activity (e.g. Celsus *De medicina* 1.10.1; 1.9.2; Galen, *On Semen* 1.16.23). Motivations for and against sexual intercourse differed, as did the extent to which moderate activity would add or decrease physical capacity of men. What is clear though is 'that sexual control and avoidance were concerns in a wide range of social locations ... [and] ancient culture linked sexual indulgence to impurity or weakness and valued its avoidance or control' (cf. Martin 2001:83–97, esp. p. 90).



Perhaps the time has come to rethink the insistence that masculinity is performed in the shadow of an overarching patriarchal domination<sup>22</sup> (e.g. Liew 2003:93–135). In fact, a common and even standard way of defining 1st century masculinity with singular appeal to categories of domination over others may not be so useful, since a 'wide spectrum of abstract power relations and grades of social stratification were reified in sexual terms' (Skinner 1997:12). This means that the 'marked differences between cultural expectations for Roman matrons and for their counterparts in contemporary Greek communities' (Skinner 1997:9, cf. 7–11) added permeability to perceptions about women and femininity and thus jeopardises any attempt to categorise masculinity unambiguously. In the Roman imperial era women were increasingly conceptualised in a bipartite way, both as 'same' and as 'other' (Skinner 1997:10–11). As mentioned earlier, masculinity was not only a matter of anatomy nor a simple matter of either sexual prowess or sexual control. Physiology was important, especially in Roman law, but gender performativity were determinative and not only on a sexual level.<sup>23</sup> In fact, '[v]irtue was so intimately linked to maleness in the Roman universe that it is impossible to separate Roman definitions of masculinity from more general notions of ideal human behaviour' (Kuefler 2001:19).<sup>24</sup> This brings us back to our starting point, namely that masculinity in all its ambiguity was not reactionary, did not rest on misogyny and was not the result of some sociological sedimentation. Rather, masculinity existed in as much as it defined and therefore exemplified humanity in the 1st century and the rest followed from the construction of masculinity.

The strongest indication of the power of (and exerted through) masculinity was its ability to define humanity itself. Becoming like their gods, the ultimate deity conversely was considered male – the true model for masculinity, rationality and virtue. Notwithstanding all its ambiguity, in the 1st century masculinity was co-constitutive of human life, with manliness defining what it meant to be a human being. 'Virtue was so intimately linked to maleness in the Roman universe that it is impossible to separate Roman definitions of masculinity from more general notions of ideal human behaviour' (Kuefler 2001:19).<sup>25</sup> Masculinity in the sense of the performative system and structure of maleness pervaded the pervasive empire of the

22. My foray into the views and uses of masculinity in the Gospel of Mark has convinced me that no complete or meaningful analysis of masculinity can be made in separation from a thorough examination and critique of patriarchy' (Liew 2003:135).

23. Gardner (1998:147–148) summarises as follows: 'legal capacity and gender role in Roman society depended upon assigned sex at birth. Males were those who had what passed for male genitals (even if dysfunctional or later removed), and they had public and private rights including *potestas* which were denied to biological females. Sexual ambiguity was recognized only in the case of hermaphrodites and was resolved in a rough and ready way by assigning them the gender role of what appeared to be the prevailing sex'. Even in the case of castrati, their condition was not grounds for curtailment of their legal rights as male citizens (Gardner 1998:145–146).

24. Compare for example *Amm. Marc.* 25.4.1 on Emperor Julius (4th century CE); Lactant (*De Opificio Dei.* 12.16–17) makes the rather spurious connection between *vir* [man] and *virtus* [courage].

25. The link between masculinity and virtue goes back to the Greek tradition, with Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (4 BCE) already connecting virtuous deeds and being a man in the typecasting of Cyrus as ideal Hellenistic king (cf. Conway 2008:23).

1st century, but also provided one of the building blocks of empire.<sup>26</sup>

## Paul's self-presentation and 2 Corinthians 10–13

Paul's letters are gendered discourse. Not only are the letters embedded in, but they also carefully use and subconsciously subscribe to gender patterns and posture. Paul's letters, then, are involved in gender performativity of the time. Paul was a 'pretty normal' male and 'not particularly culturally conditioned' (Clines 2003:192). As Penner and Vander Stichele (2005) argue:

Paul does not have a 'theology of gender', but a 'gendered theology' that permeates all aspects of his discourse and thinking, resulting in ... a Pauline world that is devoid of significant female presence, especially in the 'inner sanctum of Pauline theology'. (p. 236)

The effect of the gender performativity of Paul's letters is properly felt in ensuing centuries and to this day in certain parts of the world, even if the effects of his letters' gender negotiations are difficult to gauge. Then again, the aim of this article is not a social (re)construction attempt that would want to map the (possible) influence or even the effects the letters could have had on the communities Paul addressed.

My interest is rather in the ideological stance and positions assumed and claimed regarding gender in Paul's self-portrayal in authentic Pauline texts restricted here to 2 Corinthians 10–13. While '[t]he undisputed letters of Paul reveal the early impetus to transform the humiliating death of Jesus' crucifixion into the manly death of a hero' (Conway 2008:87), the discussion here entails aspects of masculinity with regard to Paul's self-presentation. The argument stems from the previous section with the acknowledgement that '[i]n a society for which masculinity was such a valuable commodity it could not be allowed to become the property of just anyone who happened to have been born with the prescribed genitalia' (Martin 2001:106). It would be naïve to think that the Pauline letters, which put such a high premium on the negotiation of identity, would have stood aloof towards the construction and ideology of masculinity in the communities they addressed. In fact, some scholars hold that Paul's 'utilization and basic acceptance of the values associated with masculinity are ... readily apparent' (Conway 2008:68).

Tracing gender ideology in Paul's letters is no simple affair, though. The gender paradox of ancient times was that '[a]lthough the presence of male reproductive organs could not prove one's manliness, there were other aspects about the body that could betray it' (Conway 2008:18). Caution is advised not to monolithise or to abuse stereotypes as

26. Masculinity can therefore not be separated from other related aspects of the Roman Empire at the time. Worries about an inferior masculinity and fears of feminisation are etched against a successful and superior imperial masculine rule in the 1st century (see Conway 2008:11), if not masculinity. Was Roman imperialist masculinity so secure and untroubled if so much was invested in material form to claim imperial masculine superiority?

historical descriptions<sup>27</sup> and to be equally careful not to flaunt modern concerns, consciously or otherwise, which would in the process negate or minimise the ancient socio-historical context (not kicking out a hegemonic male behind every bush, but rather tracing and picking up on the ideological masculine underlay of ostensible ordinary matters). In fact, since the indicators of gender identity included bodily posture, style of walking, carrying of the hands and so forth, rather than simply physical anatomy or even basic physical appearance, Paul's claims on masculinity cannot be restricted to indicators of maleness, as would be obvious to ancient as well as modern readers.

Although sexual morality was hardly a central concern of his, Paul often presented his arguments in sexual terms. One scholar argues that Paul's use of body, sex and gender categories serves the purpose of defining the identity of the followers of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> Paul managed to combine sentiments from his Jewish background with its emphasis on moral purity and holiness as determined by the Israelite covenant – a potent discourse found in the Scriptures of Israel – with Greco-Roman ideas about masculinity and legitimate authority – notions that aligned well with prevailing Stoic sentiments regarding moral purity and self-mastery, where self-mastery and restraint indicated virtue and social elitism (Knust 2006:51–87).<sup>29</sup>

### Paul, typical or untypical man?

For all of Paul's interest in bodily things, and notwithstanding the fact that a body theology approach makes eminent sense in the interpretation of Paul's letters (see Punt 2005; 2010; 2011), he mentions little about *his* bodiliness and offers no lecture on masculinity. The impression conveyed by the Pauline texts is that of a basic acceptance of masculinity to which the recipients could and even should aspire. 'One also sees Paul engaging a range of cultural discourses on masculinity that would convince his audience of its attainability through a life in Christ' (Conway 2008:69). The fact that the rhetoric and appeals of Paul's letters are steeped in masculine aspirations, invoke manliness as theme and criterion, and generally slots in with ancient constructions of masculinity without making masculinity the theme, is difficult to dispute.<sup>30</sup> At least two exceptions exist to the dichotomy of Paul's pervasive yet subtle use of masculinity

27. Paul's juxtaposition of Jesus-followers exercising self-mastery (1 Cor 7) and gentiles 'enslaved to lust' (Rm 1), places him in 'a long-standing polemical strategy familiar to Greek, Judeans, and Romans alike: vilifying outsiders and defining insiders on the basis of sexual virtue and vice' (Knust 2006:63–64).

28. If, in a Greco-Roman context, an "elite" was one who avoids excess, masters desire, conforms to "natural" gender, and displays virtue, then Paul's condemnation of gentiles – they are incapable of mastering desire – suggests that only the followers of Christ were truly "elite" ... Paul does not really challenge the terms of his argument ... rather he reconfigures this cultural logic in order to claim elite status for his group exclusively ... a hostile move in the first-century Mediterranean' (Knust 2006:85–86, 71).

29. Like Paul, another 1st century Jewish writer, Philo (QE 1.7; cf. also *Spec. Laws* 1.200–201) shared the prevailing gender ideology of Roman masculinity: the female is not an autonomous category, but a derivative of masculinity. From his letters, Paul's Jewishness did not seem to impinge on the prevailing Roman gender ideology or his masculine self-portrait. In any case, socio-cultic practices (e.g. circumcision) aside, a major discrepancy between 1st century Jewish and Roman masculine ideology is not apparent.

30. As Moxnes (2003:3–29) argues about 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, the male subject serves as epitome figure for Pauline ethics as he did not even mention women.

amidst an apparent lack of interest in the topic: his engagement of cultic perspectives and contexts (e.g. on circumcision see Phlp 3:2–21; Gl 5:2–12) and autobiographical apologetic sections (e.g. Gl 1–2; 2 Cor 10–13). As for the latter, his self-presentation in 2 Corinthians 10–13 shows up interesting aspects of the masculinity Paul claimed.

In 2 Corinthians 10–13 Paul presented himself as a heroic man who has overcome many and serious setbacks, and who simultaneously enjoys leadership status in the community and who also has risen above his detractors, the super-apostles (ὕπερλιαν ἀπόστολοι, 2 Cor 11:5; 12:11).<sup>31</sup> His claims on manliness are poised on a knife edge, cloaked as his discourse is both in terminology that threatens to destabilise his claim on masculinity as well as terminology that ostensibly denies any of his aspirations to the ideal manly portrait.

On the one side of things, Paul claims masculine prerogatives through his battle talk, destroying strongholds and arguments (πρὸς καθάρεισιν ὀχυρωμάτων, λογισμοὺς καθαιρούντες, 2 Cor 10:3–6[4]); his self-control even in boasting (οὐκ εἰς τὰ ἄμετρα καυχησόμεθα, 10:13–18[15]); not standing back for the super-apostles (μηδὲν ὑστερηκεῖν τῶν ὑπερλιαν ἀποστόλων, 11:5; οὐδὲν γὰρ ὑστέρησα τῶν ὑπερλιαν ἀποστόλων εἰ καὶ οὐδὲν εἰμι, 12:11b); and, exercising power and claiming authority over the community (ὅτι ἐὰν ἔλθω εἰς τὸ πάλιν οὐ φείσομαι, 13:2; ἵνα παρὼν μὴ ἀποτόμως χρῆσωμαι κατὰ τὴν ἐξουσίαν, 13:10).

In fact, the whole of 2 Corinthians 10–12 is undergirded by Paul's explicit claim upon *self-control*, often considered to be a crucial measure of masculinity. In this passage, Paul time and again claims his boasting for what it is, but carefully qualifying it as just enough and in just the right way (i.e. in the Lord) to prove his point.<sup>32</sup> Paul's self-depiction as a self-controlled man deserve special attention since he claims self-mastery amidst the vicissitudes of life, in fact, as in 2 Corinthians 11:16–33 fairly on the edge of life. His measured and controlled boastings (2 Cor 11:16–18, 30) constitute the frame of the pericope in which Paul extolls his sufferings: imprisonments, lashings, beatings, shipwrecked, adrift at sea, suffering danger from people and nature, toil and hardship, hunger and thirst, cold and exposure, and pressure and anxiety (11:23–28; cf. 6:4–5). The apostle's letters to the Romans and to the Galatians, in particular, but also those to the Corinthians describe the new life in Christ according to increased freedom and control over bodily desires, and therefore a heightened sense of masculinity. The rhetoric of Paul's appeals is that Jesus-followers like him, those 'in Christ', were the only men really capable of mastering desire (Knust 2006:85) and therefore truly masculine.

31. The rhetorical force of ὑπερλιαν is irony, since Paul explicitly refers to his detractors as false apostles and evil workers camouflaged as Christ's apostles (οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι ψευδοἰστολοι, ἐργάται δόλιοι, μετασηματιζόμενοι εἰς ἀποστόλους Χριστοῦ, 2 Cor 11:13). He even compares them to Satan (2 Cor 11:4).

32. 2 Corinthians 10:13 is telling ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ εἰς τὰ ἄμετρα καυχησόμεθα ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τοῦ κανόνος οὗ ἐμέρισεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεὸς μέτρον, but also compare 2 Corinthians 10:8, 15, 17; 11:16–18, 21, 30; 12:1, 5–6. Self-mastery is important to Paul elsewhere also having warned the community earlier against lack of self-control (ἀκρασία, 1 Cor 7:5) and as the inclusion of ἐγκράτεια (in Gl 5:23) as part of the fruit of the Spirit shows.

Paul's emphasis on fictive kinship through *household* terminology was not only about community issues and did not only express a concern for identity. In as far as governance or control over a household was also a marker of masculinity (D'Angelo 2003:265) fictive kinship was connected to gender construction and ideology. In 1 and 2 Corinthians fictive kinship notions, especially appeals to sibling and parent-child relationships, inform Paul's arguments and appeals.<sup>33</sup> In 2 Corinthians 10–13, however, fictive kinship terms are not explicitly used, although Paul's reasoning in these chapters presupposes a household or family context. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul describes his role by analogy of a (Jewish) father who has promised his daughter in marriage: Paul has betrothed the Corinthians (ἡρμოსάμην ... ὑμᾶς) to Christ. Although Paul's point is directed rather at the faithfulness of the Corinthians (the analogy of a pure virgin, παρθένον ἀθένο) under pressure of the super-apostles, Paul assumed a manly and patriarchal image. In 2 Corinthians 12:14 Paul's relationship with his addressees is presented through the analogy of parents and children (οὐ γὰρ ὀφείλει τὰ τέκνα τοῖς γονεῦσιν θησαυρίζειν ἀλλὰ οἱ γονεῖς τοῖς τέκνοις). Paul's declaration of love for the Corinthians as Jesus-followers (2 Cor 11:11) does not necessarily presuppose a household setting, but certainly does not augur against it either.

Paul is revealed as largely an enabled and enabling man. In a similar way that the local elites' masculinity was linked to the emperor's whose masculinity ironically limited and subordinated the elite's masculinity in relation to the emperor, Paul looks to Christ as the one who both empowers him with strength and authority and the one to whom he readily submits' (Conway 2008:88). In the Corinthian correspondence Paul's strong hand with a stick (ῥάβδος, 1 Cor 4:21) and harsh words (cf. οὐ φείσομαι, 2 Cor 13:12) are not so subtle reminders that his demeanour, notwithstanding his ostensible humble attitude and apparent self-sacrificial position, was befitting that of a 1st century Roman man with high ideals. As Paul made quite clear, he did not regard himself in any way inferior to the super-apostles (οὐδὲν γὰρ ὑστέρησα τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων εἰ καὶ οὐδὲν εἶμι, 2 Cor 12:11). Such aspiration should not be seen as reflecting negatively on Paul as nothing less would have been expected in society. In fact, not acting manly would probably have either weakened Paul's effectiveness as apostle if not have eliminated his work altogether.

### Paul's ambivalent masculinity

On the other side of things, Paul's balancing act threatens to teeter towards gender slippage. Apart from its masculinity soaked rhetoric, 2 Corinthians 10–13 simultaneously and for some paradoxically attest to Paul's unmanliness measured by the standards of masculinity in the ancient world. At the very least ambiguity regarding masculinity is at play. The male Roman body was characterised by impenetrability, sexually or otherwise (Walters 1997:29–43). Roman men were

33. References to addressees as children or brothers, even if at times appearing to contradict each other, abound. References can be multiplied, but would include, for example, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 26; 2:1; 3:1–15; 4:14; 2 Corinthians 2:4; 6:13; 7:1; 8:1.

impenetrable penetrators 'in the context of a wider conceptual pattern that characterized those of high social status as being able to defend the boundaries of their body from invasive assaults of all kinds' (Walters 1997:30). In 2 Corinthians 11, however, Paul recounts many *invasive incursions* on his body, including beatings, lashings and even stoning.

Unlike the deutero-Pauline pastor whose silence on Jesus' crucifixion as ultimate unmanly disposition is telling, Paul revels in the crucifixion and expressly so (2 Cor 13:4; cf. 1 Cor 2:2). The pastor's emphasis is on Jesus' ἐπιφάνεια [appearing or presence] (1 Tm 6:14; 2 Tm 1:10; 4:1, 8; Tt 2:13), a cultic term associated with emperor worship. The authentic Pauline letters with their insistence on crucifixion appears, however, to shy away from the imperial image invoked in the Pastorals.<sup>34</sup> His own letters, moreover, align Paul with the crucified Jesus through the marks Paul bears in his body (Gl 6:17), unflustered by the emasculation implied through Paul's corporal hosting of the crucified Jesus (Gl 2:20; Glancy 2003:263–264). Paul's portrayal of Jesus through a rhetoric of cross and crucifixion in all likelihood connects with Paul's perception about his own masculine status as these elements were integrally linked to his proclamation of Christ and his sense of identity.<sup>35</sup> Paul claims Jesus' weakness as power that becomes the format for the lives of Jesus-followers too: καὶ γὰρ ἐσταυρώθη ἐξ ἀσθενείας, ἀλλὰ ζῆ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ. καὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἀσθενοῦμεν ἐν αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ ζήσομεν σὺν αὐτῷ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς (2 Cor 13:4; cf. 4:8–10 – afflicted but not crushed, etc.).<sup>36</sup>

One scholar (Lopez 2008:90–91) therefore argues that '[Paul] has "died to the law" and "been crucified" with Christ (Gal 2:19) so that he might live to God, producing a life of compromised masculinity that signifies vulnerability'. The resemblance of Paul's admission of beatings by both Jewish and Roman authorities (2 Cor 11:23–25) with the bodily violation Jesus suffered, is indeed hard to miss (see Conway 2008:74).<sup>37</sup> Whether Paul's compromised masculinity means that 'Paul models a *defeated*, not a heroic, male body, one that is identified with the lower status of enslavement and humiliation' (Lopez

34. Glancy (2003:86) considers the Pastorals as accomplishing more than stressing masculine ideals, suggesting that these documents serve an apologetic function too: the community 'may have felt the sting of gendered attacks against Christians and responded with pastoral advice that would ensure conformity to cultural standards of masculine deportment'.

35. Paul's self-presentation differs from the gospels' presentation of Jesus: 'What Jesus clearly did not control was the boundaries of his own body. This inability, in the eyes of educated men and those who accepted their value system, was related to his educational limitations: one of the chief benefits of *paideia* was its power to protect the body-boundaries of the educated person from violation, particularly from violations by the agents of the imperial criminal justice system. The *only* thing that the Gospel narratives tell us about Jesus' body is that it was thus violated' (Gleason 2003:326).

36. The compromised status of the crucified should not be slighted, for example a slave's punishment (*supplicum servile*, Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.169; Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.72.1–2) referred to crucifixion as *servile modum* [a slave-type] punishment. Cicero also called it the 'most savage, most disgraceful punishment' (*crudelissimi taeterrimique supplicii*, *Verr.* 2.5.64).

37. The historical Paul had written, "I bear in my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:17), identifying his own scars with the violations Jesus incurred in the ordeals of imprisonment and crucifixion. Unconcerned that he would be emasculated by his corporal hosting of a crucified man, Paul had announced, "It is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). In contrast, with his silence on the crucifixion, the Pastor separated himself from the unmanly image of the crucified Christ. Such distance was a necessary prerequisite for the Pastor's prescription of a socially conservative protocol of masculinity for male followers of Jesus' (Glancy 2003:264).



2008:91) is another question. As in Philippians, in 2 Corinthians 10–13 (esp. 11:16–33) Paul's role is defined amidst death and dying, bordering on a martyred man image – which in terms of masculinity could play out either positively or negatively.

Paul's references to *his own weakness*, to his assumption of slave status for the sake of his communities, and his focus on humility (*ταπεινός*) also appear to contradict the ideal Roman male (Mayordomo Marín 2006:18). The ambiguity that surrounded gender in the 1st century makes things a bit more complex here too and the statement that Paul's emphasis on his own weakness makes him less of a man in the eyes of others, may require further adjustment.<sup>38</sup> Not only did Paul accuse the Corinthians as complicit in his weakness (e.g. 2 Cor 12:11), but paradoxically also that his very accusers (or those suspecting him) of weakness are the living proof of the contrary (*δυνατεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν*, 2 Cor 13:3). Moreover, for Paul, weakness becomes the new power, even for men, especially if divinely inscribed.<sup>39</sup> On the one hand Paul's reversals of power (e.g. *ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι*, 2 Cor 12:10; cf. 1 Cor 1–2) radically alter a general notion of power in a crude sense of direct domination of others on surface level. Weakness inscribed in an attitude of service to others can become a whole new way of maintaining control. Competition with others as tell-tale sign of masculinity is radicalised when even the supposed losing position can be reformatted as the position of control. On the other hand, and linked to the previous point, Paul's self-mastery or self-control, especially in the face of heavy competition, underwrote his maleness. Paul did not succumb to the urges of anger, envy or over-reaction by becoming like those Paul present as his opponents, the super-apostles (*ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, 2 Cor 11:5; 12:11);<sup>40</sup> and again gender ambiguity envelops Paul's self-presentation.

Paul's supposed *weak oratory ability* (2 Cor 10:10) is often also mentioned to have posed a distraction to his masculinity (Mayordomo Marín 2006:8–10). 'In the ancient context, accusations of weakness and poor speech are challenges to one's masculinity' (Conway 2008:74).<sup>41</sup> In ancient Rome rhetorical education and public performance often triumphed over battlefield performance or ability in the *gymnasium* (Gleason 1995; cf. Mayordomo Marín 2006:8–5). Unlike Jesus, Paul, however, did exercise control over the art of oratory

38. This is not to deny Paul's marginalised position in different contexts (cf. e.g. Lopez 2008:90: 'Paul came to consciousness not as a conquering self, even though he may have started out that way, but as a marginalized "other" among many other who had been marginalized').

39. Conway (2008:75) also sees Paul's insistence on weakness as linked to power, 'this seeming weakness, reflected both in the cross and in his own body, is actually strength'. She argues, however, that Paul's hand was forced rather than that it was his deliberate strategy: 'In short, if Paul is already viewed as weak by the community, he may have little choice other than to deliberately accent that weakness and claim it as a means to power' (Conway 2008:74; cf. Savage 1996).

40. Paul's protestations in 2 Corinthians 11:7–11 waylay negative connotations attached to unwillingness to receive remuneration (free items are worthless) and manual labour (disdained by the elite) (cf. Martin 1986:344–345) that would have shown him up as untrustworthy and unmanly, among others.

41. In 2 Corinthians 12:11 Paul accuses his addressees right back: *Γένονα ἄφρων, ὑμεῖς με ἠγακάσατε*. Paul's foolishness, which is the twin of weakness, both of which in a counter-indication of masculinity, he places before the door of his community – not even the detractors.

that was strongly related to males.<sup>42</sup> Paul's references to himself *κατὰ πρόσωπον μὲν ταπεινός ἐν ὑμῖν* [I who am] (insignificant in your presence, 2 Cor 10:1) and *αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν, φησὶν, βαρεῖται καὶ ἰσχυραί, ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενής καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος* (they say while his letters are weighty and strong, his physical presence is weak and his discourse worthless, 10:3), even if through the eyes of others and even if rhetorically embedded, does not support a masculine image. Was Paul's public speaking weak or just non-conformational? Was the notion of inadequacy due to inability and ineptness or the result of Paul's alternative approach? Or did Paul deliberately invoke ambiguity in order to protect (the strength of) his gendered ideology?

In his letters Paul's self-portrayal lines up with the portrayal of the crucified Christ and evoked the image of a violated and penetrated body. Paul's accounts of punishments endured were potentially as detrimental for presenting a masculine image as was a crucified Christ. Some scholars (e.g. Conway 2008:67–88) argue that Paul's portrayals of Jesus and himself both attested to multiple models of masculinity in the 1st century CE as well as to how the very instances of the male body's vulnerability may in certain circumstances have been interpreted in alternative ways.<sup>43</sup> As we have already seen, 1st century gender performativity functioned according to a script that differed from modern versions. So too did 1st century gender slippage differ from modern gender-bending.<sup>44</sup> The ancient Mediterranean societies therefore allowed Paul's assumption of a motherly role (cf. Gl 4:19) or even that of a nanny or wet-nurse (1 Th 2:7) without impinging on his masculinity.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

The paradox of masculinity is often found in the contrast between a rhetoric of inadequacy and a controlling social experience (cf. Conway 2008:12). The ambiguity of human sex and gender, and here notions of masculinity in particular, is exemplified in Kimmel's explanation of the discrepancy experienced by an overwhelming majority of men between the social power ascribed to men and manliness, and their actual lived experience or agency as men (Kimmel 2000:217).<sup>46</sup>

42. The issue raised in 2 Corinthians 10:1–2 and 9–12 regarding the strength of Paul's letters while he is away from the community as opposed to the weakness of his words and bodily demeanour may be more rhetorical than historically descriptive. Given the recent greater appreciation for the interrelated nature of orality and literacy in the ancient world, a stark contrast between Paul's written word in absence and spoken word in presence is in any case unlikely. The issue at hand may rather be related to direct opposition from some community members that would most probably have been pertinent to Paul's physical presentation.

43. Two and a half centuries later, in the *Life of Anthony*, Athanasius of Alexandria's document, which was instrumental in promoting early monasticism, the cross of Jesus is reinterpreted. No longer is the cross the epitome of unmanliness, but it gets a new, two-fold meaning: it portrays *andreia* which in the text is courage but in masculinised format, and now it also represents complete control over passions (Athanasius, *Vita* 74; cf. Smit 2007:4).

44. As Paul's torturous allegory in Galatians 4:21–5:1 indicates, women were not only located in male-defined structures of kinship, but since women's sexuality and reproduction mediated male paternity, women and women's sexuality were potentially anomalous (to male-defined structures) and therefore had to be controlled (Briggs 1994:230–31).

45. Compare also Gaventa (1990:189–210) for Paul's theological use of the maternal metaphor and its significance. For the transgression of gender lines, compare Martyn (1997:424–431) and Osiek (1992:333–337).

46. In his argument that in America masculinity parades as homophobia, Kimmel (2000:217–218) offers the dissymmetry between the ascribed roles and experiences of men as the reason why feminist critique of masculinity often fails to make an impact upon men.

Run-of-the-mill, popular appeals to *act like a man* or to *man up* suggest the presence, or at least anticipation, of a commonly accepted notion of masculinity – which may be little more than pretence. One can argue that the very assumption of a common-sense notion to which people generally subscribe, is token more of the power of ideology than a description of everyday life.

Paul's self-presentation may entail in one sense little more than mirroring his 1st century Greek and Roman world in gender and masculinity. Besides everything else that can be remarked about this multifaceted world is the convoluted nature of identities formed and reciprocally inscribing that society co-formats those identities as hybrid.<sup>47</sup> In another sense, his letters indicate amidst hybridity and ambiguity, that he also deliberately or inadvertently re-scripted aspects of masculinity as demanded from his understanding of Jesus and the Jesus-followers and their communities.<sup>48</sup> Dominant male and even patriarchal notions of family and kinship relationships (father, brother) informed intra-community relations in the letters.<sup>49</sup> This article intended to show, amidst the difficulty of presenting masculinity as defined concept and well aware that the dominant discourse is always accompanied by alternative discourses, some qualities and expressions of masculinity contradictory and contested as they were in Paul's self-presentation in 2 Corinthians 10–13.

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47. Although hybrid is fast becoming an overused word, banalised to mean multiple facets to someone's identity or the notion of some co-influence from outside the conventional, it is losing its meaning.
48. In the end many questions are left unanswered, for example what difference would it have made if Paul was not from a fairly well-off family, if he did not have a reasonable education, et cetera. If Paul was of the lower class, what would his masculinity construction and ideology have looked like? If the answer is, maybe exactly the same, what would the implications be?
49. Without renegeing on the socially and otherwise prominent role of the male body of the 1st century CE, blurred gender lines, even if only during baptism rituals or in resurrected bodies, also appear to signal Paul's rethinking of austere lines of gender division.
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