Reviewer's report

Title: Masculinities and condom use patterns among young rural South African men: a cross-sectional baseline survey

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Reviewer: John Scott

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This is a useful study which may help better understand the link between masculinities and condom usage among young men. I would like to see it published, but believe there is room for some improvement to the theoretical conceptual arguments made.

The use of Connell’s concept masculinity is appropriate, but this concept also has many documented limitations, which are not explored here. One is that the concept is usually used to refer to negative or destructive behaviours, but some aspects of hegemonic masculinity may also have ‘positive’ effects. For example, assertiveness may be positive or negative in different contexts. I think the discussion section should try to engage more with the concept of hegemonic masculinity while taking care not to assume it is necessarily associated with negative or destructive activities.

‘Conservative’ beliefs are referred to throughout but it is not clear how conservative is defined here. For example, conservative may have a political meaning or be defined in social terms. I might think of someone who has conservative beliefs as someone who attends church regularly, but that may not be true of the cohort examined in the paper. In some contexts, conservative beliefs are associated with groups which have power, but the groups involved in this study would not appear to fit with this stereotype. As such, how are ‘conservative’ beliefs and/or practices to be explained? The concept needs to be better defined, given its significance in terms of the findings. The ethnicity of the study population is not discussed in detail, but I presume they are ‘black’ South Africans who are relatively marginalised in terms of employment etc. How, then, might this relate to the masculinity being played out? Some mention of how ethnicity, class and, even, rurality plays out with masculinity would strengthen the arguments here.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.