

University of KwaZulu-Natal

**An exploration of the experiences of blind male
students and how they negotiate their masculinity**

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Declaration

Unless specifically indicated to the contrary, this research report is the result of my own work.

Thokozani Isaac Sithole

ABSTRACT

Masculinity is considered to be a fundamental aspect of a male identity while living with a disability has a negative impact on the construction of this identity. The notion of masculinity has been highly influenced by Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity which claims that masculinity is not fixed but is fluid and hierarchical in nature (Connell, 1995; 2000). The construction of masculinity introduces the notion of "masculinities" rather than a "single" universal masculinity. The idea of masculinities contends that one masculinity tends to dominate other masculinities within a particular social context. For men living with disabilities this has resulted in the subjugation of their masculine identity because of the negative attitudes and assumptions attached to living with a disability. As a result of masculinity being constructed differently with each social context as well as the construction of a disabled identity, there is a need to explore this occurrence within the university environment. This study explores how blind male students construct and negotiate their masculinity within the university environment. To evaluate how blind male students construct their masculinity, the construction and experiences of their masculinity and their sexuality was explored. The barriers and enablers experienced by blind male students in the process of performing an acceptable masculinity and sexuality were explored.

This study used a sample of 7 blind male students. All participants were recruited from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus. A qualitative research design was used as a method of investigation. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and it was analysed thematically. The participants brought forward the negative attitudes and assumptions held by sighted male students that are contiguous to blindness. These attitudes and assumptions were directed mainly to their sexuality and sexual relationships. To mitigate the subordination of these important aspects of their masculinity, the findings put forward that blind male students take on different positions in opposition to hegemonic masculinity. Ordinary position, reformulation of the standards of masculinity, rebellious position, reliance and subordination of masculinity emerged as different positions that used by blind male students in the process of negotiation their masculinity. Therefore this study gives evidence that blind male students position themselves inconsistently in relation to hegemonic standards masculinity.

List of Abbreviations

HG	Hegemonic Masculinity
SMD	Social Model of Disability
MMD	Medical Model of Disability
PLWD	People Living with Disabilities
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
WHO	World Health Organisation
AMD	Age-related Macular Degeneration
RAAB	Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), an estimated 37 million people in the world are blind and about 124 million live with some form of visual impairment (Resnikoff, et al, 2004). Despite the large numbers of people living with blindness, research highlights that people living with disabilities are often marginalised and are refused their agency (Addlakha, 2007; Watson, 1998). Their marginalisation results from how disability is constructed; this creates barriers to how they negotiate their lives within societies. This suggests that living with a disability therefore become one's identity. The literature suggests that, while there is no universal definition of masculinity, there is a dominant masculinity which results in the marginalisation of other masculinities. Richardson (2010) points out that the construction of masculinity is contested and uncertain. Studies on how men negotiate their masculinity address challenges and success in conforming to standards of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Kahn, Holmes & Brett, 2011; Larkin, Andrews & Claudia, 2006). Alongside the examination of how people living with disabilities become marginalized, it is important to explore how blind male students negotiate their masculinity, especially in the university context.

Therefore the aim of this study was to explore the experiences of blind male students with regard to how they negotiate their masculinity in the university context. The study addresses how masculinity has been constructed in relation to the construction of a disabled identity, particularly for those living with blindness. This is important as living with a disability poses numerous challenges, including negotiating masculinity. In order to address these issues, this study explores the construction of blind male students' masculinity.

Problem Statement

Hegemonic masculinity is viewed as the ideal standard of acceptable masculinity and one to which men aspire (Connell, 1995). On the other hand, the construction of disability suggests that people living with disabilities (PLWD) are incapable (Petros, Airhilenbuwa, Simbayi, Ramlagan & Brown, 2006). This makes it difficult for men living with disabilities to negotiate their masculinity within the hegemonic standards of masculinity. In the literature on men living with disabilities, there is a paucity of studies on how blind men negotiate their masculinity in an unfamiliar environment such as a university. Therefore, the aim of the study is to explore disabled male students' constructions of their masculinity and the barriers and enablers to the establishment and performance of a satisfactory masculine identity. It also explores the strategies employed by blind men to renegotiate their masculinity and sexuality within settings that are highly hegemonic. Therefore, the study adds to the body of knowledge in this field.

Research Objectives

- To explore the construction and experience of masculinity among blind male students.
- To explore the construction and experience of sexuality among blind male students.
- To explore the barriers and enablers experienced by blind male students in the process of performing an acceptable masculinity and sexuality.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1: This chapter provides an introduction to the dissertation. It includes the problem statement; the objectives of this study and the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2 focuses on the construction of disability and how it unfolds as a marker of difference through a review of the relevant literature. It considers how masculinity is constructed and how disabled men construct their masculinity and negotiate it within hegemonic standards.

Chapter 3: This chapter discusses the methodology employed in this study. It outlines the data collection process, ethical considerations and the limitations that were encountered.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4 outlines the data analysis process and discusses the findings of the study.

Chapter 5: This chapter provides a detailed conclusion and recommendations for future research and interventions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines how masculinity has been presented in the literature and how it has been constructed. It introduces theories that are commonly used in understanding the construction of a disabled identity. This chapter also looks at the relationship between masculinity and disability by drawing on different approaches that have been used to understand masculinity and disability. Finally, it explores the impact of disability on masculinity and sexuality and vice versa.

2.1 Disability

Disability is often studied through the lenses of two opposing models, namely the medical and the social model of disability.

2.1.1 Medical Model of Disability

According to Kaplan (1998), the medical model developed from the enhanced role of physicians in the 19th century and expectations that a disabled person could be ‘fixed’ as long as they followed their medical treatment. This suggested that the challenges associated with a disability reside within the individual. Therefore, disability is located within the individual and the body. This model regards the challenges that disabled people experience as resulting from the functional limitations or psychological losses which are assumed to arise from disability (Oliver, 1990). However, it does not take into account the fact that the individual is embedded within a social context which directly and indirectly shapes their experiences. Instead, disability is viewed as a result of an impaired body (McDonald, Keys & Balcazar, 2007; Shakespeare, 2000; Ridolfo, 2010).

2.1.2 Social Model of Disability

Disability becomes a marker of difference for people living with disabilities by not allowing them to be regarded as normal despite their abilities. The challenges they confront not only result from their inability to perform as expected by society but from their impairment which affects their identity. Therefore, PLWD have been represented differently in different societies, either being viewed as special or as unfortunate. According to Buntinx and Schalock (2010), there has been a shift in the construction of disability “from focusing on the pathology or a defect within the person to a socio-ecological person-environment fit concept that focuses on understanding human functioning and disability based on the interaction between personal and environmental characteristics” (p.284). Early models of disability like the medical model were highly influential in how PLWD were treated (Brainhe, n.d.,para.1). The social model of disability (SMD) addresses the shortcomings of the medical model by relocating disability in social interaction rather than in the body (Barnes, Alexander & Fishman, 2002).

The social model draws an important distinction between impairment and disability. It defines impairment as the lack of a body part or organ, having a crooked limb or psychological impairment (UPAIS, 1976). By separating disability and impairment, this definition highlights that impairment is a malfunction of a certain body part. Disability is therefore an outcome of social and physical barriers that preclude those with some form of mental or physical impairment from functioning as society expects (Finkelstein, 1990). Therefore, rather than being defined in relation to physical and psychological impairment disability is the outcome of the barriers within the environment. “This distinction is embedded in social constructionism (a philosophical foundation of the social model), which states that these terms differ in that impairment exists in the real physical world and disability is a social construct that exists beyond the use of language but within a multifaceted organization of shared meanings, discourses and limitations imposed by the environment at a particular time and place” (Brainhe, n.d.,para.6). Therefore, it is not their impairments that cause people living with disabilities to be referred to as disabled; they are disabled by the barriers and attitudes that exist within the society.

For example, a wheelchair user becomes disabled when a building does not have ramps (Carson, 2009). This highlights that it is the environment that causes an individual with any form of impairment to feel disabled as they cannot perform certain things that are expected by the community, such as using a staircase when they are in a wheelchair. The social model of disability argues that PLWD are impaired but not disabled; it does not ignore the impairment but states that disability results from the impairment and the environmental and social response to it. The architectural limitations in the environment stop people living with disabilities from performing tasks that are performed by others who do not live with disabilities which then set them apart from others. Therefore it can be argued that because of these constraints, the attitudes about what they cannot do become central to their identity and their construction is believed to be an absolute truth about abilities.

The social model of disability therefore offers hope that discrimination can be eliminated by reducing these barriers with support from people without any form of disabilities. It considers how society contributes to the construction of an individual's identity. It "recognizes social isolation as the most significant problem experienced by persons with disabilities and as the cause of many of the problems that are regarded as intrinsic to disability under the other models" (Kaplan, 1998, p.2). Moreover the social model of disability is not only interested in the exclusion of PLWD as a result of social barriers, but also argues that the construction of a disabled identity can be disabling. People living with various forms of disabilities are marginalized and are regarded as not functional. This exacerbates the challenges they confront in negotiating as well as living their lives in a normal and acceptable way.

Since the majority of people are able-bodied, PLWD become easily marginalised. Their impairment becomes their identity, which plays out as a marker of difference. This is the result of the alienation of PLWD and the discrimination they suffer because they are regarded as different. PLWD confront negative attitudes; physical, emotional and psychological challenges; the stigma of being labelled different and isolation. According to Watson (1998), living with a disability is a highly stigmatised identity which PLWD tend to internalise and accept. This suggests that disability not only creates barriers to social interaction but also creates challenges in communication as well as accessing resources because of the internalisation of what is constructed about what they can do and what they cannot do.

There is a tendency for people with disabilities to be regarded as incapable, resulting in their isolation. Due to social expectations, PLWD are marginalised (Meekosha, 2004; Sakellari, 2006; Shakespeare, 1999; Taleporos, 2001). This results from society's reaction to their inability to perform certain tasks in their social context. Sherry defines disability as "any physical, cognitive, intellectual, appearance or sensory impairment, or other medical conditions that limits a person's major life activity" (2008, p.1). According to Addlakha (2007), experiences of subordination and marginalisation result from the fact that PLWD are regarded as helpless, not normal and a burden to their family as well as the community; this is similar to the way in which the moral model of disability defines disability.

2.1.3 Moral/Cultural Model

Kaplan (1998) points to another model which is relevant to the contemporary African context. She defines this as the 'moral model' of disability. Some cultures associate disability with sin, shame and other religious doctrines. According to Kaplan (1998), the shame extends to the entire family of someone living with a disability which results in social ostracism and self-hatred. Sesay's (n.d.) study of community-based rehabilitation and an empowerment project for the blind in Sierra Leone found that the family members of those living with disabilities often do not want to interact with them because of their disability and the beliefs surrounding it. This demonstrates that not only does living with a disability create isolation, stigma, and inequalities but it affects relationships as well as social support. In most African communities including some parts of South Africa there are superstitions around people with disabilities. Among the superstitions highlighted by Baker, Lund, Nyathi and Taylor (2010) are negative beliefs around albinism. Their findings in South Africa and Zimbabwe reveal the different discourses attached to albinism, including the fear of contagion; albinism is believed to be a curse on the family and therefore a child born with albinism should be killed. These findings therefore highlight how disability is constructed as immoral by different cultures and societies.

2.1.4 Conclusion

The theories on disability introduce different approaches which are often used in understanding the construction of a disabled identity. These include the medical model of

disability, the social model of disability and the moral model of disability. The medical model does not take the social environment's influence on people with disabilities into account. Its emphasis on the body tends to ignore other important factors that create barriers for people with disabilities. On the other hand, the social model and the moral model illustrate the direct and indirect impact of the social environment on the construction of a disabled identity. In contrast to the medical model, they highlight the difficulties experienced by PLWD within their societies which are the result of attitudes, social responses and discourses constructed about disability. These models highlight how we construct what we believe to be the truth about PLWD and how disability unfolds as a marker of difference between those who are able-bodied and those living with disabilities. Therefore, living with a disability is said to create barriers and challenges to PLWD's interaction with their environment. PLWDs are therefore not treated as equal citizens. Given these models of disability, it is therefore important to explore to what extent these approaches influence the construction of a disabled identity within the university population.

2.2 Masculinity

2.2.1 What is masculinity?

There has recently been an upsurge in scholarly interest in the concept of masculinity and what constitutes masculinities (Connell, 1995; Morrell, 2001; Seidler, 1989). Contemporary studies on masculinity have been highly influenced by Connell's notion of this concept. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), the concept of masculinity was first mooted about two decades ago. Burnard (2008) suggests that "masculinity refers less to the physical or behavioral characteristics of an individual, and more to a way of gendered relating between individuals in a system" (p.12). Burnard argues that masculinity is shaped by physical and behavioral characteristics which are influenced by the intersection between gender and the social environment. Thus Mackay (2009) suggests that masculinity results from social interactions and is also shaped by different contexts. This suggests that it is a product of social interaction which is gendered. Therefore, masculinity is constructed and depends on the social context and the environment.

Connell (1995) argues that masculinity cannot exist except in relation to femininity. This is because masculinity dominates femininity. Connell emphasizes that masculinity is a gendered construction and is therefore a powerful and dominant gender identity. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1996) point out that the definition of masculinity focuses on the norms and expectations between genders. Men's actions are influenced by the beliefs that aim to control their behavior and their relationships with women (Lindegger & Maxwell, 2007). These norms are conditioned in behaviors and roles regarded as gender appropriate. For example, men are expected to perform certain tasks. In terms of these norms, inability may suggest femininity or promote a subordinate masculine identity. Lebeso (2007) cites the notion of being '*ubusoka*'¹ as a common practice of masculinity in the South African context. This normalised masculine practice enables one to be revered as a man. Failure to conform to this gender role results in a subordinated masculinity which is feminised. This highlights the power differential achieved through gender roles, with femininity subordinate to masculinity. As a result, the failure or inability to perform gendered masculinity roles is constructed as feminine.

Anthony's study of *Black Masculinity and Politics* (2010) notes, that, the meaning of manhood is perceived differently across cultures. This suggests that masculinity is constructed

¹ *Ubusoka* refers to the popular belief that in order for one to be a real man one should have as many women or girlfriends as possible (Lebeso, 2007).

and differs across different contexts. Because of this, Connell proposes the notion of multiple masculinities rather than a single universal masculinity. Connell's argument is based on the reality that people's interactions are different and therefore the construction of masculinity will not be the same. For example, among the Owambo people of Namibia, men's strength and their masculinity are defined by what they own; for example, millet, many cattle and having many children and wives (Brown, Sorell & Raffaelli, 2005). Another example is in popular culture, as depicted in the media masculinity is associated with money, physical appearance, being (hetero)sexual and flashy cars (Hollander & Jocelyn, 2001 in Alexander, 2003). Therefore, it can be argued that masculinity is not fixed, but changes over time.

Hadebe (2010) observes that masculinity shapes men to conform to what is socially perceived to be masculine or to be traits of manhood. According to Brown et al. (2005) masculinity is a set of behavior roles that men are encouraged to perform. Holmgren and Hearn (in Blackbeard, 2011) define masculinity as a set of norms that are learned and lived in order for men to retain power over women. However, Shuttleworth, Wedgwood & Wilson (2012) note that while masculinity is believed to facilitate men's dominance over women, it can also be used by some men to exert power over other men. To make a point on this Wetherell and Edley (1999) observe that there is always a winning masculinity that is held up as the standard that men should live up to and this winning masculinity exert power over other masculinities.

2.2.2 Social Construction of Masculinity

In South Africa, history is an important determinant of masculinity due to colonial and cultural influences on the construction of a male identity. According to Morrell (2001), historical experiences have a significant influence on the construction of masculinity and how these experiences shape the way men live their lives. Shikumo (2008) observes that remnants of the apartheid regime influence the way in which men construct their masculinity. This highlights the importance of understanding that masculinity is a product of social construction that is influenced by and changes from context to context. It suggests that what is viewed as a masculine identity in one context could be viewed differently in another context, among different cultures and in different environments. It also implies that the construction of masculinity is informed by different conditions and views such as those attached to disability. Langa (2008) notes, that, in South Africa, the way masculinity has and is being acted out by

men has been highly influenced by socio-historical and political contexts. Stevens and Lockhart, (1997 in Langa, 2008) criticize young black men's masculinity post-1994 by referring to it as masculinity of a 'lost generation' because of their lack of interest in politics compared with young men under the apartheid regime. According to Alexander (2003), in the modern world, masculinity is about how you feel, think and behave. For example, Langa (2012) found that adolescent boys defined their masculinity in terms of things such as branded clothing.

According to Alexander (2003), the construction of masculinity intersects with race, ethnicity, class, nationality, age and religion. This highlights that masculinity is a product of social construction which is constructed differently in different social contexts. Connell (1987 in Wetherell & Edley, 1999) further argues that the characteristics of masculinity are not given; they are a product of gender regimes within cultures and historical periods. Every culture employs certain discourses of masculinity (Kiesling, 2007). Connell (1987 in Wetherell & Edley, 1999) notes, that, these discourses determine the characteristics of masculinity and therefore maintain hegemonic standards of masculinity. Kiesling (2007) identifies heterosexism, dominance and male solidarity as some of the characteristics of masculinity held by cultural discourses. For example, gender difference discourse emphasizes inequalities between femininity and masculinity. It argues that masculinity cannot exist except in relation to femininity. Heterosexist discourse sees masculinity as heterosexual; sexual desire between men and women. The dominance discourse associates masculinity with authority, power, strength and control especially towards women but also when compared with other men. While the discourse on male solidarity focuses on the collaborative power among men. It is therefore important to determine how these discourses are constructed.

In the South African cultural context, men and women are treated differently. Their socialization from birth differs, with men being socialized according to masculine norms and independence while women are socialized to be passive in order to become obedient wives. For example, in the Zulu culture a young man with more than one partner is called *isoka*, which signifies admiration. Polygamous relations are also seen as culturally appropriate. These notions of gender difference in the South African context are highly hegemonic and indicate how masculinity is socially constructed differently across contexts. Both in the past and in present times, a man would demonstrate his masculine identity through power and dominance over other men, the number of wives he has or the number of cattle he owns.

Kiesling (2007) identifies heterosexism, dominance and male solidarity as the cultural characteristics of masculinity that tend to work together in a patriarchal manner, which is the core of hegemonic masculinity. These cultural discourses are parallel to hegemonic masculinity and highlight how the construction of masculinity is shaped by context and time.

The construction of masculine identity is said to result from social interaction (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). This suggests that peer relationships are central in shaping men's masculine identity. Jenkins (1996 in Richardson, 2010) states that a man's masculine identity is moulded through relationships with people with the same characteristics as well as those with distinct characteristics. For example, men who regard extreme sports as a way of demonstrating their masculinity would usually identify with other men who either play or support these types of sports. This echoes Blackbeard and Lindegger's (2007) point that masculine identity is formed through relationships and shared experiences.

2.2.3 Hegemonic Masculinity

The literature on masculinity has been highly influenced by Connell's notion of 'hegemonic masculinity'. "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity is described as a practice that allows men to dominate women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The concept of hegemonic masculinity influenced research on men or what is known as masculinity studies. The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' was first presented in studies of inequality in Australian high schools and in discussions on the role of Australian men in the country's labor politics (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell adds that hegemony can only exist when there is a correspondence between cultural ideals of masculinity and institutional power. It should be noted that the word 'hegemony' has been used to highlight power relations. Connell uses the term 'hegemonic masculinity' to highlight gender differences based on power. Hegemonic masculinity suggests inequalities and power relations between men.

Although hegemonic masculinity has been used to account for men's control over women, it also has a huge influence on power relations between men. Connell (1995) contends that masculinity is hierarchical in nature and that hegemonic masculinity is a dominant version of

masculinity. This implies that hegemonic masculinity is an acceptable form of masculinity that depicts how real men should behave (Shefer, 2006). Connell contends that some relationships among men have tended to render some men dominant, resulting in the subordination of others. For example, gay men become subordinated to straight men through different practices; furthermore, being gay is associated with femininity and therefore becomes a subordinated masculinity (Connell, 1995). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) observe that there was an increase in sociological research focusing on gender and power structures in the mid-1980s. These studies understood hegemonic masculinity as a pattern of practice that was respected as a normative way of being a man. This emphasizes that even though there are other masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is dominant.

Since hegemonic masculinity is regarded as a dominant form of masculinity that subordinates other masculinities, it is important to identify the characteristics that differentiate it from other masculinities and how it is used by men to achieve a dominant identity. Wall and Kristjanson (2005) state that hegemonic masculinity is represented by being tough, showing less emotional sensitivity, and demonstrating success, power and being self-sufficient. Connell (1995) regards hegemonic masculinity as “dominant, aggressive, superior and violent compared to other masculinities, because it subordinates other men” (p. 77). To indicate this Langa (2008) describes how male peers use language to coerce one other into maintaining certain standards of masculinity. The inability to comply with these hegemonic standards suggests a subordinated masculinity that results in some men being excluded. Niehaus (2005) and Pattman (2005 in Langa, 2008) found that in the South African context, different words like ‘*kgope*’ or ‘*lekgwala*’ [a boy without a single girlfriend] or *ibhari* [a boy who is too scared to talk to girls]” (p.7) were used to subjugate those who did not conform to the norms of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity therefore takes on a form of policing of other men through othering. Therefore Connell (in Wetherell & Edley, 1999) observes that in order to be a man, one needs to position oneself in relation to hegemonic masculinity; this is a constant struggle. Mills and Lingard (1997) claim that men face an on-going struggle to live up to this idealized and accepted form of masculinity. Therefore achieving a hegemonic masculinity is always threatened and failure often results in subordination by other men.

Wetherell and Edley (1999) critique Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity, arguing that it fails to identify the process by which men negotiate their masculine identity. Connell’s notion tends to focus on how men position themselves within the hegemonic standards of

masculinity. Wetherell and Edley (1999) assert that men hold numerous positions with regards to masculinity. Shefer (2006) also critiques Connell's work, pointing out that men may choose to take up different positions in different social contexts and relationships.

2.2.4 Multiple Masculinities

The idealized form of masculinity differs across social contexts, although when these masculinities meet, one tends to dominate (Connell, 1993; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Langa, 2008). Because masculinity is socially constructed and each social, cultural and historical context is unique, it is expected that there would be multiple masculinities. This emphasizes that fact that masculinity is not fixed and that there are different discourses of masculinities. Connell (1995) notes, that, a configuration of practices is performed in different situations within changing structures of relationships. Langa (2008) concurs and observes that, "young boys' views on masculinity are also fluid rather than fixed or static, and are dependent on the situation in which they find themselves" (p.7). Therefore, the notion of different masculinities is established in relation to other masculinities and femininities through gender relations (Connell, 1995). For example, Brittan (1989 in Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996) notes, that, in order to become a man you must first become aware of how it is to be a man. This can be achieved through social interaction and gender constructed norms of being a man. Therefore when we talk about multiple masculinity we often refer to different styles of self-presentation because of the way in which masculinity is constructed (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003). In conclusion, there is no single masculinity and masculinity depends on situations and other masculinities in order to dominate. Thus Langa (2008) adds that masculinities are always competing; demonstrating that masculinity is a product of social construction.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) contend that the changing nature of masculinity suggests that masculinity is often negotiated. Given the fact that a dominant masculinity is often contested it is important to address how men negotiate their masculinity in order to achieve a dominant masculinity as well as avoid a failed one. Wetherell and Edley's (1999) study on how men negotiate hegemonic masculinity found that men adopted different positions. The first is the *heroic position* which is described as leaning towards hegemonic masculinity due to the fact that men align themselves with prescriptive masculinity norms. To reach the heroic

position some men used an *imaginary position* where they position their lives parallel with the standards of hegemonic masculinity. The second pattern is the *ordinary position*. This includes negotiating hegemonic masculinity through which these men separate themselves from the customary ideas of masculinity by reconstructing these ideas as “social stereotypes” and positioning themselves as normal or ordinary (p. 343). According to Wetherell and Potter (1992 in Wetherell & Edley, 1999), the *ordinary position* emerges when people are given a chance to position themselves within a society. Thereafter, the prescriptive social norms are reconstructed as stereotypes. This therefore positions the individual away from the stereotypical realm (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). The final position is the *rebellious position*; in this pattern, men disregard social expectations by positioning themselves unconventionally. According to Wetherell and Edley (1999), this implies that one feels comfortable about oneself with regards to one’s preferences. In conclusion, their critique of Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity suggests that there are multiple positions available for masculine identity in relation to hegemonic masculinity.

Moreover, Connell (2000) identifies three types of masculinities (complicit, submissive and oppositional/protesting masculinity) that exist as a result of power differentials among men. According to Shefer (2006), complicit masculinity refers to a type of masculinity where men do not always accept the hegemonic standards of masculinity; they may choose to live up to the dominant standards of masculinity or reject them. Submissive masculinity always complies with the dominant standards of masculinity, while oppositional or protesting masculinity is a form of masculinity that is always in opposition to the dominant standards of masculinity. These types of masculinity proposed by Connell (2000) reconcile with that of Wetherell and Edley (1999). Similar to Connell’s (2000) oppositional/protesting masculinity, a rebellious position identified by Wetherell and Edley proposes that some men protest against social expectations of masculinity. Although complicit, submissive masculinity and ordinary, heroic position do not have similar characteristics with one another, but they also ascertain that men hold different positions with regards to masculinity thus rejecting the notion of a single and universal masculinity.

2.2.5 Masculinity and Sexuality

To understand the construction of sexuality, Simon and Gagnon (1968) suggest the use of the sexual scripts as these are essential in understanding the development of a behavior within a social context. Simon and Gagnon (1968) believe that sexuality is a learned behavior which is influenced by a set of social scripts that are shaped by socio-political culture and history. In order for a particular behavior to occur, three analytically different levels need to exist, namely, cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts and intrapsychic scripts. These scholars suggest that in order for “a situation to become (or be perceived as) sexual, a series of sequenced events must occur in the proper order (the script), in the correct place (the stage), and involve the appropriate people (the actors)” Simon & Gagnon (1968 cited in O’Byrne & Watts, n.d., p7). This not only implies that social interaction has a significant influence on human sexuality; it takes into consideration the biological conditions embedded within an individual in accordance with their interaction with other socio-political factors. Frith and Kitzinger (2001) highlight that the central notion of this theory is that sexuality is learned through available scripts and that these scripts become internalized by individuals as ‘intrapsychic’ scripts and are therefore acted out through their interpersonal relationships.

According to Simon and Gagnon (1968) all these scripts have a different influence on the way in which people define and experience their sexuality. Factors such as culture, social norms, the construction of masculinity and living with impairment may have an impact on the way that individuals construct and experience their sexual lives. These scholars also underline that social settings are the platforms for determining whether an individual is sexually experienced or not, given their engagement and/or avoidance in the practice of sexuality. This also plays a major role in a person’s life as it has a direct effect on their behavior in the context in which they are embedded (Simon and Gagnon, 1968). Frith and Kitzinger (2001) trace the use of scripting theory to its application in studies on women’s sexuality from adolescence to old age, women’s lack of interest in sex, people’s behaviour on their first date and the behaviours that lead to sexual intercourse. According to Thompson and Scott (1990 cited in Frith & Kitzinger, 2001), this theory values the nature of sexuality as well as the process we use to understand the construction of what we consider to be sex. Hyde and Oliver (2000) observe that sexual script theory complements the social construction perspective as they both take into account the fact that that behaviour results from social constructs.

Brown et al (2005) identify a link between masculinity and sexuality. For example, men's desire to have many girlfriends may be seen as an expression of the standards of hegemonic masculinity which are central to their self-esteem as men, while it is also highly sexualized. Prince and Hawkins (2002 in Brown et al, 2005) found that sexual relationships were important in defining young Zambian men's self-esteem and social status. A similar study by Wood and Jewkes (2001) among young men in a Xhosa township in KwaZulu-Natal found that manhood was determined by the number of girlfriends one had. This resonates with Brown et al (2005) notion that there is a relationship between masculinity and sexuality by arguing that men often express their masculinity by their desire to engage in sexual activities with multiple partners.

Hollway cited in Langa (2012) also states that sex is seen as masculine trait or a physical need for men. Langa (2012) found that young boys' need to prove their masculinity to young girls is highlighted by the pride they take in having multiple female sexual partners. This is a way of achieving a dominant status in relation to their peers, similar to the notion of hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, a lack of sexual skills and experience marginalizes those who cannot conform to such lifestyles and their masculinity is problematized and questioned (Beigi & Cheng, 2010). Sexual scripts proposed by Simon and Gagnon (1968) are therefore a good framework of understanding sexuality; which has been observed as central in the construction of a masculine identity. This framework gives confirmation that the construction of sexuality can be comparable with that of masculinity.

2.3 Disability and Masculinity

Men's strength in general is measured by their physical appearance, strength and performance. Any impairment can compromise their identity as men (Cecil, McCaughan and Parahoo (2010). The inability to live up to the expected roles of a man may not only lead to the adoption of a disabled identity but can involve *othering* resulting in a subordinate masculinity. For instance, not being able to perform expected gender roles is a burden to men living with disabilities since their impairment may limit their ability to comply with normative masculine standards. Shakespeare (1999) describes this as 'double disadvantaging' and notes that this is not only the result of stigma, but of a failure to perform what is expected of their gender due to their impairment. A disability such as deafness can hinder one from negotiating intimate relationships with girls due to the fact that not everyone can communicate using sign language. Shakespeare (9999) shows that living with a disability may limit a person from conforming to expected gender roles which also reinforces a person's second class status as a man. For example, blind men's agency as men may be undermined as their impairment may limit them from participating in social interaction with other men, such as passing comments on a woman's appearance. It is therefore important to highlight how disability intersects with other aspects of masculinity.

2.3.1 Impact of disability on Masculinity

The barriers and stigma experienced by PLWD lead to 'othering'. According to Petros et al (2006) *othering* is a process in which people are marginalized – causing them to perceive themselves as worth less than others. According to Said (1978) *othering* occurs when a person is objectified by someone by disregarding the agency they hold and the voice they have. Given the widespread *othering* of PLWD, it is important to investigate how living with a disability affects one's masculinity. According to Shuttleworth et al (2012), research on gender and disability suggests a conflict between masculinity and disability. They add that, given that both masculinity and disability are socially constructed, this is due to the cultural and social expectations of masculinity as well as the construction of a disabled identity. This raises questions like "how do disabled men negotiate the intersection of these two social categories of experience?" (Shuttleworth et al, 2012, p.175).

Joseph and Lindegger (2008) found that conformity to hegemonic standards of masculinity among adolescent boys living with visual impairment is difficult since their impairment leads to a measure of dependence which is considered a mark of femininity rather than masculinity. While their isolation seems to be driven by their inability to perform according to socially expected roles, their dependence may also reinforce a subordinate masculinity. Joseph and Lindegger (2008) concur with Renold (2004) that masculinity is constructed in relation to 'otherness'. Failure to live according to the standards of masculinity may cause them to feel lost, helpless, and inferior. Edward (2006) therefore describes this masculinity crisis by describing two of its components, that which arises from within and that that arises from without. The crisis without refers to the position that men occupy in their environment, while the crisis within looks at the shift in men's experiences, their position as men and what it mean to be a man. Therefore, the feeling of being *othered* suggests masculinity in crisis due to a "sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness and uncertainty" (Edward, 2006, p.6). Given that the hegemonic standards of masculinity require men to be tough, strong and desired by women; any failure to display these characteristics due to disability may increase the challenges in achieving an accepted masculine identity.

It is important for people living with visual impairment to be able to decide how to position themselves in relation to the standards of hegemonic masculinity at the same time as acknowledging their vulnerability to anxiety and distress (Joseph & Lindegger, 2008). Gerschick and Miller's (1994 in Shuttleworth et al, 2012) study on men with acquired impairment developed an approach to identify disabled men's responses to hegemonic masculinity that was adopted from Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity. This approach was termed the 'Three R Framework'. The three relationship responses they address are *reliance*, *reformulation* and *rejection*. Gerschick and Miller (1994) found that some disabled men based their sense of self on standards of hegemonic masculinity; they termed this a *reliance response*. Some reformulated hegemonic masculinity ideals in order to accommodate their lives as men living with disabilities; this is referred to as a *reformulation response*. The *rejection response* refers to those who conveyed another form of masculinity which addressed the realities of their lives. The study revealed that disabled men who were more reliant on the standards of hegemonic masculinity tended to internalize feelings of inadequacy.

Shuttleworth et al (2012) state that "men who reformulated masculine ideals, although distancing themselves from hegemonic masculinity, did not present a challenge to the gender

order because they still perceived their dilemma as an individual project” (p.177). Thus rejecting the standards of hegemonic masculinity gave them hope that their lives would change for the better. Joseph and Lindegger’s (2008) study reached similar conclusions. They found that in order for adolescent boys to measure up to the hegemonic standards of masculinity they first accepted that they had a disability; this made it easier for them to acknowledge their abilities. Thereafter, they identified themselves with various aspects of hegemonic masculinity in terms of physical appearance, performance, independence and being in control and admired by women (Joseph & Lindegger, 2008). Although they indicated that accepting this enabled them to live up to the set standards of masculinity, their impairment did impose limitations. This emphasizes Gerschik and Miller’s (1994) point, that living with a disability, like blindness, may hinder men from meeting the set standards of masculinity and may damage their self-esteem due to feelings of inadequacy. Moreover, Cecil et al (2010) notes, that in order for men to adopt a positive life style despite their impairment they need to reject dominant hegemonic notions of masculinity. For instance, if being a man is constructed as being able to go parties and get drunk; this could pose a challenge to someone living with blindness if they were to walk alone at night while under the influence of alcohol. Therefore, Cecil et al (2010) claims that in order for men living with impairments to not feel inferior, they need to reject the standards of hegemonic masculinity and adopt a lifestyle that suits them.

2.3.2 Disability, Masculinity and Sexuality

Sexuality is one the avenues through which men with disabilities have been marginalised. Meekosha (2004) observes that PLWD are often represented as asexual. This may negatively impact individuals living with a disability. It may also hinder men with disabilities from establishing an acceptable masculine identity, due to the centrality of sexuality to a masculine identity. Although such negative attitudes may motivate men to prove their sexuality, they could also prevent disabled men from expressing and negotiating their sexuality. Pleck (1981) notes, that, social expectations require men to be sexually competent. Oliffe (2005) emphasizes the importance of sexual performance for a masculine identity, suggesting that those who are disabled and unable to perform sexually become marginalized and their masculinity becomes subordinated. He adds that in order to understand the basis for

masculinity it is important to acknowledge that if these standards are not met, men will feel that they have failed.

Sexuality is an important aspect of masculine identity. Being disabled may impact negatively on a man's identity due to the normative standards associated with gender and sexuality. This may be because PLWD tend to be viewed as asexual (Meekosha, 2004). Meekosha observes that prejudice results in PLWD's sexuality being overlooked. McCabe (1999) points out, that, such perceptions exist at different levels of society. They are informed by the social construction of disability, such as its definition in the moral model of disability. Bullard and Knight's (1981) book, *Sexuality & Physical Disability* recounts their personal experiences and difficulties as people living with physical disabilities. They describe their feelings of exclusion that made it challenging for them to express their sexuality. They add that one of the most crucial problems facing all people is how to create a partnership and intimate relationship with others. This is even more difficult for PLWD because they are often excluded from social activities such as sport, school and jobs where one might meet sexual partners (Bullard & Knight, 1981).

Cheausuwantavee (2002) observe that if society overlooks the sexuality of PLWD, it not only marginalizes them but also prevents them from expressing their sexuality. This is particularly true in relation to people living with blindness, "because we are not where the other people are" (Bullard & Knight, 1981; p.6). Therefore, it is important to understand how men living with visual impairment negotiate their sexuality. Sakellariou's (2006) study of men who were physically disabled as a result of spinal cord injury found that society's construction of masculinity often caused barriers for men living with disabilities regardless of how they express their sexuality because a disabled identity is a marginalized identity. Cole and Glass's (1977) study on physical disability and sexuality among men living with spinal cord injury found that they were less inhibited about discussing issues and that their concerns included reproduction, self-image and their ability to please their sexual partners. This suggests a preoccupation with certain aspects of their masculinity other than simply sexuality.

McCabe et al (2003) found that a severe physical disability resulted in low sexual esteem, sexual dissatisfaction and higher levels of depression than having a mild disability or not having one at all. Low sexual esteem among people with physical impairments results from the social barriers associated with the condition (Taleporos & McCabe, 2001). These findings

concur with the social model of disability that states that a disabled identity is a product of the way in which living with impairment has been socially constructed. Therefore, the way in which disabled people's sexuality is constructed poses difficulties for how they express themselves sexually – leaving them feeling less of the man they are expected to be. The assumption that PLWDs are asexual discourages potential partners, which in turn suggests a failed masculinity accompanied by low sexual esteem. While living with a disability does not necessarily result in sexual impairment, these normative standards and expectations inhibit PLWD's sexual experiences.

Hegemonic masculinity values sex as the ideal way to demonstrate one's masculinity (Richardson, 2010). Richardson (2010) notes that young men who are unable to have sex as a result of impairment reported that they felt depressed, useless and embarrassed as they were unable to perform one of the most important functions of being a man. The construction of youth masculinity emphasizes that men should live according to what is expected of them, which includes sexual performance.

2.3.2.1 Impact of disability on sexuality and masculinity

Finding a sexual partner is an important aspect of hegemonic masculinity. Given the challenges men living with disabilities confront with regards to how their masculinity has been constructed, it is very difficult to establish intimate relationships. According to Kempton and Kahn (1991 in Rembis, 2009), living with a disability can have a negative impact on a man's identity not because of how they perform sexually but with regards to finding someone to be intimate with. These findings resonate with Bullard and Knight's (1981) experience of living with a disability; because they are often excluded from social activities, it is difficult to find intimate partners. This negatively impacts their masculinity and sexuality and they therefore cannot meet acceptable social standards. Finding a partner is therefore a challenge for disabled men due to the marginalization of their identity and the fact that their masculinity is overlooked because of attitudes relating to disability.

However, Guldin (2000) observes that some men with disabilities do not let this incapacitate them. They are still sexually active, have fulfilling sex lives, and many are in rewarding

relationships, something that not all able-bodied people achieve. Addlakha (2007) points out, that, PLWD's need for sex often exceeds other people's expectations. McElduff (in Rembis, 2009) found that PLWD claim to be better lovers and that they derive greater pleasure as a result of oral sex and 'going slow' during intercourse as well as the use of erotica and other sexual practices. This suggests that living with a disability has made some PLWD better partners in their relationships. In response to their disability and the attitudes attached to it, they explore their own sexuality as well as their partner's in order to become better partners and challenge these assumptions (Guldin, 2000; Rembis, 2009).

It is a challenge for disabled men to conform to hegemonic standards of masculinity as well as reclaim their manhood. The fact that their masculinity is often marginalized requires that they adopt strategies to challenge assumptions and negotiate their masculinity. Taleporos (2001) observes that being unable to express their sexuality contributes to a negative sexual identity among men living with disabilities, as they are incapable of practicing one of the important aspects that define manhood. This resonates with Taleporos and McCabe's (2001) notion that living with a disability poses potential harm to an individual's sexual esteem which in turn negatively affects their sexual identity due to the difficulty of living up to standards of masculinity. Addlakha (2007) shows that "the disjunction between traditional notions of what it means to be a man: aggressive, strong, self-reliant and providing financial security and social status to family, and being a man with a disability in need of assistance, has potentially devastating consequences on sexual identity and overall self-concept of men with disabilities" (p. 113). Although PLWD may be dependent because of their inability to perform certain tasks, this does not necessarily imply that they are sexually incompetent and thus failures as men.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on masculinity and disability. It discussed the different approaches adopted to address disability, namely; the social, medical and the moral model of disability. These approaches address the formation of a disabled identity. While the medical model locates disability within the body, the social and moral models of disability suggest that disability is socially constructed. Therefore this chapter argues that disability is more a product of the environment rather than the actual impairment. This is because literature suggests that it is the social environment that usually causes PLWD to be disabled. These arguments therefore suggest that disability is socially constructed.

The reviewed literature further looked on the formation of a masculine identity by arguing that masculinity is neither fluid nor universal. Drawing from Connell's idea of multiple masculinities, this chapter came to the conclusion that masculinity is socially constructed and experienced differently by men in different contexts. This further put emphasis on Connell's notion of multiple masculinities and that within these masculinities there is always a winning or a dominant masculine identity.

This chapter further looked on the notion of hegemonic masculinity in conjunction with living with a disabled identity. Because hegemonic masculinity has been central to the construction of male identity, living up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity is addressed as a struggle among men living with disabilities. This has resulted in the subjugation of their masculine identity which has resulted to their abilities being overlooked by other men, like how they have been regarded as asexual.

While a number of studies have been conducted on masculinity and disability, there has been relatively little focus on intersection between disability, masculinity and sexuality. There has also been very little focus on the way in which disabled boys and men take up various positions in relation to hegemonic masculinity in the process of forming a viable disabled masculine identity. This is therefore the focus of this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The literature on masculinity and disability and on how disability affects the construction of a masculine identity provides some ideas regarding how blind men construct their masculinity. However, there is a gap in the literature in relation to how masculinity is negotiated by blind male students in a university setting. The broad objective of this study is to explore how blind male students negotiate a masculine identity by positioning themselves in relation to hegemonic ideals. This chapter discusses the principal method used to collect data, and the synthesization and integration of the findings with the research objectives.

3.1 Research Design

Given the broad objective of the study, a qualitative research design was considered most appropriate. The decision to use a qualitative research design was motivated by the fact that it allows a researcher to explore meaning, and describe and promote an understanding of human experience (Brink, 1996). Furthermore Ulin, Robinson, Tolley and McNeill (2000) note that qualitative researches design is flexible and encourages the discovery and further investigation of unexpected phenomena. The selected research design is in line with the aims of this study, namely, to explore blind male students' constructions of their masculinity as well as their sexuality within a university environment.

A qualitative research design elicits information from a participant's perspective and allows the researcher to be creative and involved (Ulin et al., 2002). It gives a voice to those who are often marginalized. Rather than quantifying people, a qualitative research design takes people's experiences and meanings into account. It takes "people's subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what is real for them, making sense of people's experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us" (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 1999, p. 273-274). Employing this design enabled more in-depth understanding of

blind male students' experiences in terms of masculinity through personal engagement rather than quantifying or measuring this aspect of their lives.

Patton (2002) regards qualitative design as a naturalistic design because the “research takes place in the real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest [e.g., a group, event, program, community, relationship, or interaction] (p.39)”. The research participants were interviewed in an environment familiar to them; in their university residence rooms. Qualitative research studies aim to understand the world of those they wish to study (Maxwell, 1998) in three different ways. Firstly, they aim to understand the meaning of people's life experiences; secondly, to understand the particular context within which people act; and finally, to understand the process by which events or actions take place. These are all important aspects of the current study as it sought to understand the meaning of participants' experiences, the context in which their experiences are embedded and how they negotiate their lives in this context.

3.2 Sample

The study participants were seven blind male students recruited from a pool of students with visual impairment living in student residences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Howard College Campus. Patton (2002) emphasises that the sample size in qualitative research depends on the researcher's needs, how the findings are going to be used and the time available for the completion of the study. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the participants. Participants were not chosen according to the nature of their blindness; however, two types of blindness (congenital and acquired) are presented in the sample.

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Race	Cultural Group	Level of Study	College	Nature of Blindness
SB	23	Black	Zulu	1 st	Humanities	Congenital
SL	26	Black	Muslim	4 th	Humanities	Acquired Blindness
FT	22	Black	Zulu	3 rd	Humanities	Acquired Blindness
JHN	41	Black	Sotho	2 nd	Humanities	Acquired Blindness
PML	27	Black	Sotho	Postgraduate	Humanities	Acquired Blindness
SPHL	31	Black	Zulu	3 rd	Humanities	Acquired Blindness
YN	20	Black	Xhosa	2 nd	Humanities	Acquired Blindness

Table 1. Demographic presentation of the sample

All the participants were from different age groups, resided in the same residence and were registered in the same college. Howard College campus was chosen because it accommodates a number of students with different types of disabilities including a large population of students living with blindness. This particular group of students was chosen as the researcher was interested in exploring participants' experiences with regards to their disability and the construction of their masculinity. After interviewing seven participants, saturation was reached. According to Dworkin (2012) saturation refers to the stage where data collection no longer provides new information or contributes to new insights. Dworkin adds that it is not up to a researcher to determine when saturation is reached; many factors determine the point of saturation. These include the heterogeneity and homogeneity of the population study. In this study, the point of saturation was reached with seven participants because they were a

homogeneous group. From engaging with the participants it was brought to the researcher's attention that a majority of them have been to schools for learners with disability prior to their enrolment to university.

3.2.1 Sampling Technique

Participants were recruited from a pool of students living with disabilities through the use of snowball sampling. According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011), a snowball sampling technique involves asking participants if they know someone who meets the criteria set for a study. "An advantage of this method is that potential participants are typically linked to the study by a familiar, trusted person who can describe the interview process and alleviate any concerns, thus potentially increasing participation in the study" (Hennink et al, 2011, p.100). Using this method, the researcher chose a few participants who then recommended others who were willing to participate to the point where saturation was reached. After receiving permission to conduct the study from the university's Disability Unit, it was easy to find one student willing to take part who then referred the researcher to others who he thought would be willing to participate. Recruiting participants was an anticipated challenge to this study. However, the snowball sampling technique made the process relatively easy. Sarantakos (2005) observes that snowball sampling is essential when it is difficult for the researcher to approach the participants due to issues such as time constraints on the part of both the researcher and a potential participant.

The process began with one blind male student who was identified by the University Disability Unit. This participant was informed about the aims of the study and was given copies of the research information form which was printed in braille to give to his blind peers. This enabled potential participants to choose whether they would like to take part in the study or not and for each participant to be able to refer other potential participants.

3.3 Data collection

This study used an interview guide for semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B). Data was recorded using a tape recorder. The semi-structured interviews were developed from an intensive review of the literature as well as from the main objectives of this study. The interview guide included a series of questions and probes. According to Patton (2002), the interview guide makes the interviewing process more systematic and comprehensive by concentrating on issues of interest to the researcher. Kelly (2006) contends that individual interviews allow the researcher to understand how participants feel and think. The interviews explored participants' experiences regarding their masculine identity and sexuality as men living with blindness. The use of individual interviews to explore masculinity among boys enabled Frosh et al (2003 in Smith, 2008) to discuss sensitive issues which the participants would not have talked about in any other setting. In the current study, this method enabled the researcher to ask questions regarding experiences in negotiating masculinity as blind men, such as "what does it mean to be a man living with blindness?" (see Appendix B). Holliday (2002) notes, that, this data collection method allows participants to answer questions freely, while the researcher gains a deeper understanding of their views. Probing questions were used to invite participants to give more detailed responses while allowing the researcher to gain a better understanding of what they were saying.

3.4 Procedure

The first step in the data collection process was obtaining permission for the study from the university's Disability Unit (see Appendix C). Once permission was received from the head of this unit, the researcher embarked on recruiting participants. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. The aim of the study as well as the informed consent form was read to all participants prior to interviewing them. Each then gave verbal consent. They were assured of confidentiality and that pseudonyms would be used. The participants were also encouraged to make use of the counselling services offered to them if they experienced distress as a result of the study.

Participants were interviewed in their rooms at the university residence. The interview questions were in English and all interviews were conducted in both English and isiZulu in

order to enable participants to share personal information without having to be cautious of the way they expressed themselves. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions, probes and follow-up questions. Probing questions were used to gain a better understanding of what the participant was saying or to allow them to give more detailed answers. According to Patton (2002), probes are used to gain an in-depth response to questions and increase the richness of the responses. Each interview took approximately one hour. Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants a degree of freedom in explaining their thoughts and highlighting areas of particular interest and expertise that they felt they had, as well as enabling certain responses to be followed up in greater depth (Horton, Macve & Struyven, 2004). In order to ensure that the data were accurately captured, permission was sought to use a tape recorder and take notes; all participants consented. All interviews were carefully transcribed from isiZulu into English before they were analysed. Being isiZulu speaking, the researcher was able to refer to the original isiZulu texts.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once collected, the data were transcribed and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. Thematic data analysis is a qualitative method of analysing and reporting data through the identification of themes. It breaks data down into patterns or themes that relate to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The motivation for using this method of analysis is that it is data-driven and allows a researcher to identify common patterns in the data. This allowed the researcher to identify common themes addressed by blind male students in relation to how their masculinity is constructed. According to King and Horvocks (2011), this method of analysis allows a researcher to identify and work with the iterating issues that arise from different participants.

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify six important phases (see Figure 1) of analysing data thematically. The initial phase was to familiarise myself with the data through listening to the tape recordings and reading transcripts. Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) emphasize that good analysis starts with understanding data. The second phase was to come up with descriptive codes from all the transcripts. Thirdly, all the descriptive codes were organized into themes relating to the research questions. The fourth phase was to review all the themes,

searching for coherence. The fifth phase focused on naming, refining and giving clear definitions to each theme. The final phase was to derive overarching themes and report on them. The themes are presented drawing on different excerpts from the transcripts to illustrate the findings in relation to the research questions.



Figure 1. *Six Phases of Thematic Analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

3.6 Establishing Rigour

Ulin et al (2002) identifies four criteria that are important to validate the quality of research of qualitative research. These criteria are dependability, credibility, transferability and conformability of the research findings. Dependability refers to an extent where the “research process is consistent and carried out with careful attention to the rules and conventions of qualitative research methodology” (Ulin et al, p.26). To ensure dependability in this study, research questions were consistence to the objectives of the research and the chosen methodology of the research was appropriate.

According to Ulin et al (2002) credibility in research refers to truthfulness of the findings. The findings in this study show credibility because they are consistent to each other; they are also supported by the direct quotation from the participants. According to Yin (1994 in Ulin et al, 2002) credible research findings should be logical and should be supported by narrative data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994 in Ulin et al, 2002)credibility of qualitative research also requires the researcher needs to report back his/her findings for the purpose of being validated by research participants. However, this aspect of checking credibility in qualitative research was not done in this study.

Another aspect of establishing rigour suggested by Ulin et al (2002) is transferability. According to these scholars, transferability in research means that the findings of that research can be applied to another group of people in another context. Because this research gives the conditions, population and context to which this research was conducted, it would be easier for another researcher to use information from this study to another context.

Conformability suggests that the researcher is aware of their personal values during the process of the research and be able to minimize any possible influence (Ulin et al, 2002). These scholars further assert that applying reflexivity in qualitative research contributes to the conformability. In this study conformability was achieve through the researcher’s engagement and review of each interview to identify the researcher’s assumptions which might or might have influenced the information gathered during the interview process.

3.7 Ethical considerations

This study was guided by the code of ethics in social research as stipulated by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2004) and Emanuel, Wendler and Grady (2000). The researcher received ethical clearance for this study from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethics Committee. Permission to conduct research among students living with disabilities was also granted by the head of the university's Disability Unit. The aims of the study were explained to potential participant to allow them to choose whether or not to participate. Each student that agreed to participate was given a consent form. According to Emanuel et al (2000) informed consent is an important ethical principle for participants in research. The researcher ensured that the consent form was printed in braille which made it easier for each participant to engage with.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2004) and Emanuel (2000) emphasize that when informing research participants about the conditions of the research attention should be given in order to ensure that participants are aware of their right to participate, refuse participation as well as their right to withdraw at any time. Therefore there was transparency with each participant because they were made aware that the study was conducted for academic purposes and that there would be no direct benefits to those taking part in the study. Before the interviews commenced, the aims of the study were explained to each participant verbally and they were assured that their participation was voluntary and that confidentiality would be maintained. Emanuel et al (2000) note, that, participants must be accurately informed about the purpose of the study, methods, risks, benefits and alternatives. Permission was sought from each participant to use a tape recorder and take notes.

All were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable and that withdrawing would not disadvantage them in any way. It was emphasized that they did not have to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with. Pseudonyms were used in the transcription to protect the identity of the participants. The data obtained was safely stored in the School of Psychology archives for a minimum period of five years. Prior arrangements for individual counselling were made with the university's counselling centre for any participant who felt that they needed it during and after their participation in this study. However, there were not participants who withdrew from the study and also there was no one who sought counselling after being interviewed. Once the data were collected, participants were informed on how to access the final study as well as their right to access

any publication that may arise from the study. The outcome of this study will be therefore made available to participants in the form of a soft copy.

3.8 Limitations of the methodology

There are various limitations to the sample used in the study. Although the findings of this study highlight important issues relating to men living with disabilities, especially those who are blind, it did not include all races, only a sample of black students was used. This means that the results may not be generalizable to all blind male students due to race and cultural differences. All the participants resided in one university residence, which could also explain their construction of a collective identity. It is possible that the somewhat different data might have emerged had the study participants not all resided at one residence that is mainly assigned to male students with disabilities. Furthermore, the fact that the study was restricted to students only further impacts the generalizability of the findings.

The use of semi-structured interviews and probes might have negatively influenced the findings, as their consistency could have been compromised by the use of probes. The use of semi-structured questions might have had a negative influence on the findings because the participants asked the researcher to rephrase questions that they did not understand. Therefore the same questions were phrased differently to different students. Awareness that the interviews were being recorded might also have influenced some participants' responses. A second round of interviews could have yielded information omitted in the initial interviews and enabled additional, relevant questions to be asked.

Another limitation to the study is social desirability. Given that the researcher was of a similar age as the participants, their responses could have been expressed in a manner which they thought would be favourable to the researcher, or in attempt to impress the researcher. In contrast to this the participants might have been self-conscious about discussing issues concerning to their sexuality. The issue of recording of the interviews might have further exacerbated the issue of social desirability.

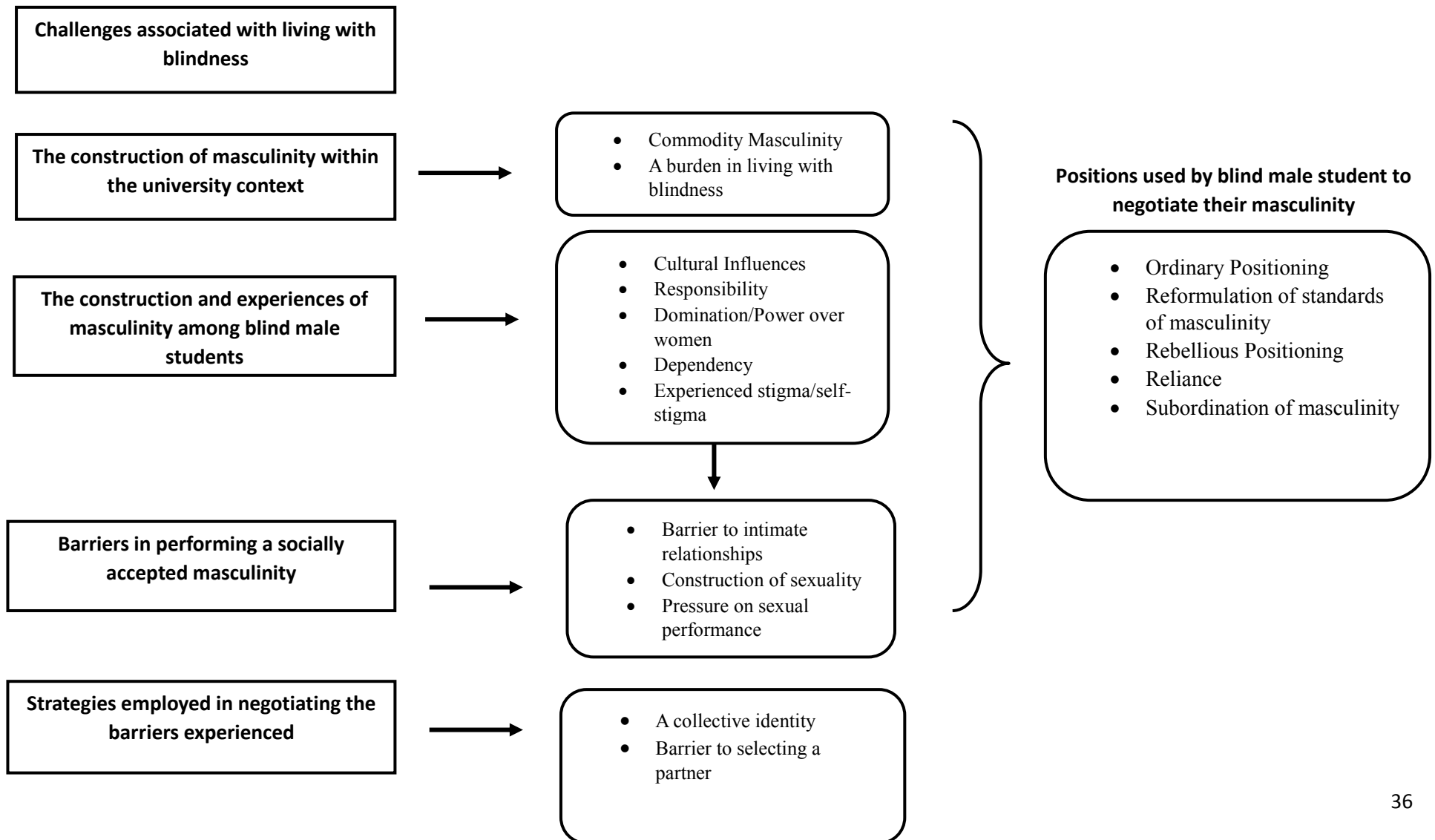
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the experiences of blind male students with regard to how their masculinity is constructed and how they renegotiate their masculinity within a highly hegemonic university environment. It presents and discusses the findings emanating from the interviews with the participants in order to answer the research questions. The findings are discussed in conjunction with the literature on both masculinity and disability in order to provide more insight. The thematic method of analysis produced overarching themes as well as sub-themes. These are presented through the use of verbatim quotes from participants in order to substantiate the findings. The themes presented in this chapter aim to address the objectives of this study. Taking into consideration the premise of this study, the findings address issues of how blind male students negotiate their masculinity in a university environment.

Summary of the Findings



4.1 Construction of masculinity within the university context

This theme examines how masculinity is constructed in a university context. The findings suggest the construction of masculinity within the university environment to be hegemonic because of the shared standards of masculinity among boys. Blind male students tend to experience challenges in establishing a masculine identity parallel to that shared by sighted male students. Negotiating their masculinity is often seen as a struggle due to how it has been constructed by others and how they are positioned by non-disabled students. They find the standards of masculinity shared by other male students very immature because of the way other male students behave to show their masculinity and therefore find them not deserving of being recognised as men. This is a result of a conflict between what these blind male students have constructed to be a masculine identity compared with what sighted male students have constructed. In the following excerpt, SL describes how he finds himself not fitting the version of masculinity embraced by able-bodied students, a version which he regards as immature and unacceptable. He positions the standards of masculinity set in the university environment by sighted male students as beneath being a man and more being a boy.

“There is nothing in particular that I see here that makes me to say I am a man here in the institute rather than what I see it what makes me a boy, like gathering around with the boys and talk about the girls talk about money or talk about all this crazy stuff that boys talk about but when you are a man I think you should talk about things that are more informative, things that would groom you towards marriage life (.) the maturity life. Here is all about boozing, girls, girls, and girls this, girls that) particular girls”. – SL

SL's excerpt suggests that blind male students' construction of masculinity is in conflict with the standards of masculinity as constructed by sighted male students. These findings concur with Anthony's (2010) argument that masculinity is common within the same context and different within different contexts. This is because blind male student's construction of a masculine identity differs from that of sighted male students. Their values with regards to how they construct a masculine identity have been influenced by their previous environment (special school) – which has shaped their experiences. As a result the concept of masculinity shared by

male students may differ from the university context. Although they share the same context, blind male students regard their masculinity as more than that shared by other male students. This is in accordance with the relational response to masculinity addressed by Gerschick and Miller (1994 in Shuttleworth et al (2012); in order for disabled people to negotiate their masculinity, they reformulate it. SL reformulates his masculinity as not being a problem and shifts the problem to the standards of masculinity shared by sighted male students. The findings reveal that although these blind male students formulate their masculinity to accommodate their limitations or what are seen as limitations by other male students, they regard mainstream standards of masculinity as immature and therefore tend to reject what is regarded as normal. Wetherell and Edley (1999) describe this as an ordinary position for negotiating masculinity because these male students tend to separate the self from the prescriptive norms or standards of masculinity referred to as social stereotypes.

The findings reveal that blind male students' construction of masculinity is different from the way masculinity has been constructed by sighted students in the university environment. Because of their values and limitations in living up to the expected standards of masculinity, blind male students construct their masculinity by positioning it differently from that of other male students, rendering the process of negotiating their masculinity a challenging one. These challenges are generally rooted in the hegemonic standards of masculinity and how they align themselves with these standards. In accordance with hegemonic standards of masculinity, male students are said to be expected to perform certain activities such as consuming alcohol, smoking and having a certain number of girlfriends. Blind students have difficulty in performing some of these distinctive behaviors of hegemonic masculinity. In order to avoid the sense of failed masculinity which may result from this inability, they position the other male students and their behavior as immature and not worth following. SL discusses pressure to perform certain activities that are constructed as standards of masculinity:

“If you are a blind youngster between 18 and 20 years and you do not have a girlfriend it is too much pressure for you (.) There is lot of peer pressure because sometimes you just come here at varsity to study and you do not drink and you do not smoke, you don't have a girlfriend (.) your friends will just influence you because they are also involved in drugs, girlfriends. They will just

say 'hey yey wena come and join us, SL if you want to be a man you must drink and you must smoke and you must have a lot of girlfriends'". – SL

SL raises concerns about pressures to conform to these standards of masculinity which conflict with the reason for being at university. Again in order to avoid being seen as failed man, he frames these pressures as inappropriate.

Paradoxically, the findings also suggest that blind male students take a position that will allow them to be like other male students in order to demonstrate that they are capable of living according to the standards of hegemonic masculinity, and that they are real men. In order to demonstrate their capabilities they find a group of men with whom they can identify and interact through their involvement in the social activities that other male students engage in. This enables them to challenge being *'othered'* and marginalised; they use this as a strategy to conform to accepted masculinity norms. Blind male students have been actively involved in sports that other male students engage in like playing blind cricket or engaging socially with other male students. The following excerpts from the interview with JHN suggest that despite living with a disability, blind male students do not let their impairment disable them by participating in activities associated with masculinity. He adds that there is no difference between him and a sighted male student.

"[...] now I am participating in many activities like school activities like playing cricket. As a sighted person I use to play soccer but now I participate in blind cricket, so there is no difference (.) just to keep my body fit". – JHN

"There is no difference, you see people who are sighted, ok they can do lot of things. Like you see (.) I do not have a problem when they are watching a soccer game; I can just go and partake. I cannot watch so I just listen to the TV, I just listen to the TV and they can say whatever they want to say but I am just sitting there with them, laughing at them you see, laughing, laughing". – JHN

On the other hand the blind male students seem to realize that because of their difference they cannot simply be like other male students, able to watch soccer and talk to other men about it.

These findings concur with Joseph and Lindegger's (2008) study that established that in order for visually impaired men to conform to hegemonic masculinity they first had to acknowledge their disability and justify their abilities.

4.1.1 Commodity masculinity

The participants also indicated that appearance and dominance are important aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Although physical appearance in terms of body structure and personal grooming are a form of gaining dominance, to affirm your masculinity through dominance over others, despite having a lot of girlfriends, wearing branded clothes is essential. YN underlines that his idea of a male identity has been influenced by standards such as maintaining an image to impress and gain popularity as well as dominance.

"You see here, what I have noticed is that we are classified by where the person comes from and from what a person wears and types of people that you associate with or go with. So most of the people who are dominant (.) I can say its people who have money and wear branded clothes; maybe a person sings or plays soccer things like that. Most of the times other have a certain dress code which I don't know where it was approved and you get them sitting in the cafeteria and buying girls things". –YN

These findings support Alexander's (2003) concept of masculinity as being achieved through appearance. Her findings also indicated a process in which men consume their masculinity through branded products and how they view themselves in comparison with other men. Similarly, Steven and Lockhart (in Langa, 2008) argue that in post-1994 South Africa, the construction of masculinity has shifted from a concern for social issues to material possessions. The current study suggests that appearance is an important aspect of masculinity among male students. This includes having a masculine body or owning material possessions. Similar to the hegemonic masculinity discussed by Connell, appearance is a marker of masculine identity and a way to achieve dominance and popularity.

4.1.2 Cultural influences on the construction of masculinity

The findings also revealed that culture has a significant impact on the construction of masculinity. Culture exerts tremendous influence on male identity in South Africa (Lebese, 2007; Kiesling, 2007). The participants revealed that they need to adhere to certain cultural practices in order to be considered a man. The most common practice identified was initiation². The following excerpt from JHN highlights in that in his culture (Sotho) this is very important:

“in order to be seen as a man you have to go to the mountains to be circumcised and then after you have been circumcised the society will than view you as a man and if you are not circumcised you are not viewed as a man. So if have been circumcised it symbolises that you are a real man (.) even if you blind you can go there to the mountains there is no problem”. – JHN

These findings suggest that from a cultural perspective, being a man is a process, which is guided by a number of customs that need to be performed. These include not only initiation but the behavioural patterns and cultural norms associated with being a man. van Vuuren and de Jongh (1999) observe that within traditional South African culture, becoming a man is a process which involves a number of cultural rituals that boys go through. Like other male students, JHN addresses the importance of culture in the construction of a masculine identity and notes that blind men are also capable of observing these cultural practices which therefore makes them men.

Despite living with a disability, these male participants indicated that it is important for them to follow these cultural customs in order to gain recognition. If they do not undergo the necessary rituals, their masculinity is called into question. Another example was provided by a young Xhosa man:

“Well as a Xhosa man the main thing is to go to the mountain which is the first stage. And when you come back from the mountain, the way you are going to handle yourself will change. The way you handle yourself is based on how many

² Initiation is a term that signifies a process of becoming a man. This ritual process is commonly known as *ukhwaluka* or *ulwaluko* and is mainly practiced among the Xhosa and Ndebele; it is symbolized by circumcision (van Vuuren & de Jongh, 1999).

girlfriends you have and do you go to ceremonies with other men. It is also based on whether you a coward or you sort things out by talking, 'is he tough?', all those things". –YN

While YN describes going to the mountain as the most important culturally based ritual in order to be recognized to be a man, there are other important things that one needs to conform to such as the way in which they carry themselves as well as attending other cultural ceremonies with men. These activities are an important indication of a masculine identity after the initiation in the mountain. JHN and YN are from different cultures, namely; Sotho and Xhosa but both address the process of becoming a man as a function of their cultures. Like other participants in this study, YN indicates the importance of following cultural rituals in order to be culturally recognized as a man compared with those who have never undergone these rituals. The first step is going to the mountain. YN further addresses the importance of showing manhood through the way you do things like how you interact with other men or having a number of sexual partners. These interpretations resonate with the qualities of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Connell (1995) contends that hegemonic masculinity is characterized by dominance, aggression and power. These findings also suggest that these men adopt a submissive type of masculinity when it comes to the cultural construction of a masculine identity. They comply with the dominant standard of masculinity which requires them to go through certain rituals and perform in a certain manner. It is interesting that cultural influences apply to both blind and sighted male students.

4.1.3 Sense of responsibility

The participants suggested that there are different types of men at the university; those who have not yet fully reached the stage of being a man and those who they recognize as men. They felt that a man requires a sense of responsibility and maturity. On the other hand, being a boy means being irresponsible. Contrary to their idea of being a man, being a boy is said to be illustrated by chasing after girls and trying to impress others by having many girlfriends, which is common in the university context. They stated that they do not find it easy to hold conversations with other male students as they define such behaviour as typical of boys rather than men. To illustrate this point FT and SB identified the types of men at the university and how they differ.

“[...]To be popular, like you are popular amongst other boys when you are like dating lot of girls than everyone will have that sort of respect for you that you are a man” – FT

“Like who drinks a lot and since he drinks a lot he is breaking the record and draws lot of people’s attention. Sometimes you find that there is someone with many girlfriends, and because he has many girlfriends he draws on attention from others and people end up talking about him that he is always having girls and he is always drinking, so that person will be on spot making people to draw more attention him” – SB

These participants referred to themselves as men as opposed to other male students whose behaviour is highly hegemonic in a sense that they have many girlfriends. The blind male students constructed this as the behaviour of a boy rather than that of a man. They claimed that their behaviour and sense of responsibility have been shaped by a number of challenges, including being blind. They described these as different from those confronting sighted male students as they arise from living with a disability. They noted that these challenges shaped the way in which they view life and make decisions. This suggests that their construction of being a man is informed by the decisions they face as disabled men and how these decisions affect their future, which imbues them with a strong sense of responsibility. This suggests that these male students position themselves in opposition to hegemonic standards of masculinity by rejecting the hegemonic standards or norms of a masculine identity as stereotypes. They also feel that their disability has given them additional opportunities to show their real masculinity in comparison with sighted boys. This is in accordance with Gerschick and Miller’s finding (1994 in Shuttleworth et al, 2012) that when disabled men were not able to live up to hegemonic standards of masculinity they tended to internalise feelings of inadequacy and subordination; in order to gain hope, they rejected these standards. Similar to the findings of Wetherell and Edley (1999) these male students position themselves as unconventional compared with other male students, claiming to be more responsible and therefore demonstrating a more mature masculinity.

The findings further suggest that family responsibility is central to these students’ construction of a masculine identity. In addition to the necessary ceremonies and cultural processes involved in becoming a man, having one’s own family suggests a strong sense of masculinity and is

acknowledged as one of the important aspects of being a man. Blind male students indicated that family responsibility is central to their construction of masculinity and they pride themselves on having this attribute that is often taken for granted by sighted male students. They noted that the importance of a family responsibility was highly influenced by their social environment, along with cultural norms on what makes a real man. The following excerpts point to the importance of acting out one's masculinity through family responsibility.

"[...] I am a man, I am a person who is supposed to grow and if it happens that I get married; get a woman to stay with, then I'll have to play that role of being a man in her life. That would be to assist her as expected by the society; that the man is supposed to act as a head of the family". – FT

"[...] you see I have a daughter and the mother of my child, I believe in having much control because (.) I try that whatever I have to share with my daughter. This is to indicate that I try although I do not have the means that I would want hence a man will always want more to provide so I do provide". – SL

For these blind male students, the ability to live up to some of the important standards of being a man described by their culture or social values, such as family responsibility, gives them a great sense of fulfilment. On the other hand, they noted that their construction of masculinity is different from that of sighted male students. FT noted that a man is supposed to be a 'head of the family'. This suggests that being a provider is an essential ingredient of their masculine identity.

SL associates providing protection with being a man. He finds that his inability to protect due to the fact that he is blind disadvantages his sense of family responsibility as well as his construction of masculinity. This is in accordance with Joseph and Lindegger's (2008) findings in their study on visually impaired adolescents' construction of masculinity; participants reported that their disability acts as a barrier to being independent.

"[...] not being able to protect yourself and other people because I feel that this is fundamental for being a man [...] And another challenge is the challenge of going out there by myself. It is a huge challenge [...]" – SL

The inability to perform according to prescriptive norms of masculinity such as protecting your partner or family is identified by this participant as negatively affecting his masculinity. This, accords with Taleporos and McCabe's (2001) study that found that disabled people's lack of independence restricts their sense of masculinity and reinforces the experiences of being 'othered'.

4.1.4 Masculinity as dominance over women

Another aspect of masculinity revealed by the participants is the contrast between masculinity and femininity. Connell (1995) argued that masculinity cannot be studied in isolation from femininity. The findings also highlight that the participants' notion of hegemonic masculinity involves dominating women. The participants observed that a masculine identity for sighted male students means taking advantage of females. In the following excerpt, PML highlights how masculinity in the university context has been constructed in opposition to femininity.

"My view of masculinity is that (.) men are violent, men are womanisers, men don't love women, they like them so they lust them(.) Women like man who have resources, women like man who are providers of resources. So men are used as much as they use women. They are used for their resources and for material resources whilst they use women for sexual pleasure" – PML.

PML feels that constructions of masculinity in the university involve having power over women. He highlights how changes in societal values have influenced the way in which men dominate women. He identifies having resources and material things such as money and cars as a primary way that university students achieve power over women. This is a form of hegemonic masculinity that comes with a notion of being dominant. PML further points out that although men use their resources for sexual pleasure, women also offer themselves to these men in exchange for these resources. This does not concur with the literature.

The findings reveal that there are certain aspects similar to the notion of *ubusoka* addressed by Lebesse (2007) which are regarded as standards of masculinity. This includes having a number of girlfriends. This involves the dominance of women as a means to confirm one's masculine

identity. The findings also revealed that most of the blind male students do not see the need to dominate by having a certain number of girlfriends. They felt this was not important in being recognised as a man. Therefore it is difficult for them to conform to the standards of masculinity that are practiced by other male students. In the following extract SPHL indicates that sighted male students tend to dominate and exert power over women as a way of demonstrating their masculinity. Like other blind male students, he opposes such common hegemonic practices.

SPHL: “[...] *they (sighted men) do not care about girls if he wants a particular girl he can get her and once he is tired of being with her, he would just leave her like that (.)*” “[...] *the way you respect women also shows your manhood than considering a woman as a sex object[...]*”

SPHL positions himself in opposition to the hegemonic practices of masculinity adopted by sighted male students as a form of domination over women. He identifies the patterns through which women become subordinated by the domination of men. These findings also suggest the *rebellious position* identified by Wetherell and Edley (1999) as the participants dismiss the normative standards of being masculine shared by other male students by positioning themselves as unconventional. Although this might suggest that they view their own masculinity as unconventional because of their values, but their views may also result from their inability to conform to these standards as a result of their disability.

4.1.5 Lack of independence

The findings also identified the lack of independence as a common barrier experienced by blind male students. This increases their difficulty in negotiating their masculinity due to the fact that independence is an important aspect of a man's identity; thus they regard dependency as a form of failed masculinity. In addition, the findings suggest that their experiences of dependence are different in different contexts. In the following excerpt, SL notes that a lack of independence is a common challenge experienced by blind men which has a negative impact on their masculinity.

“[...] not being able to protect yourself and other people because I feel that this is fundamental for being a man [...] And another challenge is the challenge of going out there by myself. It is a huge challenge [...]” – SL

The lack of independence compromises these blind male students' sense of masculinity and thus suggests an inferior masculinity. The literature has shown that living with a disability poses many challenges and that some of these result in a subordinated or marginalised masculinity (Joffe, 1999; Joseph and Lindegger, 2008; Petros et. al, 2006). This may place barriers for blind male to live up to the expectations of a masculine identity. This is also shown in the above excerpt by SL that his inability to protect people around him, which he indicates to be one of the important aspects of masculinity, tends to subordinate his sense of being a man.

4.1.6 Stigma experienced by blind male students

Assumptions that PLWD are helpless marginalise their abilities. This results in a double disadvantage as they strive to negotiate their masculinity. Such beliefs create stigmas about blind people that make the process of negotiating their masculinity a difficult one. The participants noted that stigma stands in the way of negotiating their masculinity and marginalises their capabilities. The following excerpt from SL shows how stigmatizing assumptions about people prevent them from negotiating their masculinity in the university context.

“So there are always those things in life that people think we won't be able to do whilst there is a lot that you can do which others cannot do. Likewise, to be in a relationship and date a girl, the girl will always find it difficult to be in love with a man who cannot see. I know why; it is because they have never experienced that a blind person is normal as like other guys”. –SL

SL highlights the fact that blind people are assumed not to be able to perform tasks which sighted people can perform. These findings suggest that being blind is associated with not being in a relationship. This resonates with Shakespeare's (1999) observation that people living with disabilities face constant stigma. A major concern raised by these male students is that other

students ignore significant aspects of their lives by only paying attention to their apparent limitations and so undermining their masculinity. This again emphasises how blind people are ‘othered’ and how their disability becomes a marker of difference. These findings resonate with the literature which shows that the lives of PLWD are prejudiced due to their disability (Finkelstein, 1990; Meekosha, 2004; Sakellariou, 2006; Shakespeare, 1999; Taleporos, 2001). Once more, it emphasises that society perceives blind people as abnormal and different.

The stigma attached to blind men is addressed by the participants to also over shadow their abilities. These blind male students also reported that when they perform tasks that other sighted male students perform easily, this is seen as extraordinary or miraculous. YN related how sighted male students react when he performs tasks which they thought a blind person would not be able to do.

“[...] they would judge you according to your blindness and if you are doing something similar to theirs, like being competent, they see that as extra ordinary and they end up giving you compliments that you do not deserve”. – YN

This suggests that recognition for being able to perform such tasks adds to being othered and that people make unfounded assumptions about blind male students and their lack of abilities. This, accords with Oliver’s (1990) observation that negative beliefs about PLWD are the actual causes of disability as they describe an individual as impaired.

In common with those whose blindness is congenital (born with), the students with acquired blindness revealed that it was assumed that they could no longer function the way they used to when they were sighted, again emphasizing that their blindness has become a marker of difference and made them appear incompetent in comparison with sighted male students. SL, whose blindness was acquired, highlights some of these challenges he faces as a result of people’s reaction to things that he does as a blind male student.

“You see the life of being blind, fine I have accepted it and it’s a part of me. There are things that you know you can do but people do not believe that you can do, you realise that?” – SL

Petros et al (2006) found that PLWD are viewed as something less than others, which results in their subordination and marginalisation. Their disability is taken at face value and it is assumed that they lack competence. SL's account underlines that because blind students cannot see, they are assumed to be incapable. Stigma challenges how blind men negotiate their masculinity. It also raises the questions of what can be done to overcome such prejudicial assumptions.

In the extract below SPHL highlights one of the challenges he has confronted in living with acquired blindness and how people's perceptions have changed due to the fact that he is now blind.

"[...] it has changed a lot because even back at home, maybe there is only two or three people who have accepted that I cannot see. There is a small number of those who have accepted, it only becomes better when I am here at varsity. Here (university) I become free, the environment those allow me to be blind as compared to the environment back at home." - SPHL

This excerpt highlights the challenges experienced by this participant in the transition from being sighted to acquiring blindness. He talks of the failure of his family and community to accept him; this is a common experience among PLWD. However, he describes the university environment as being more welcoming and accepting of him as a blind person than his home environment. SPHL's moving words, "allow me to be blind", give us a strong sense of his struggle to be accepted by his community; he is normally not "allowed" to be blind, but has to deny or hide the reality of his disability.

4.1.7 Self-Stigma

The findings also suggest a high degree of self-stigma among these blind male students. This, results from the assumptions attached to blind people. To a certain extent, blind male students have internalised these assumptions that they are incapable. This is highlighted in the following extract by SL:

“You find yourself blunt you cannot even approach someone you are now stuck, you even find out that sometimes you meet with someone who does not have a problem but it is just that you are concerned if maybe she might have a problem and you end-up losing out because you always think negative of yourself because of the attitude that you have been experiencing about your disability from particularly females”. – SL

SL indicates that when he tries to negotiate an intimate relationship with a girl he is concerned about her reaction. This fear results from the internalisation of the assumptions and stigma attached to PLWD. In the same way that hegemonic standards of masculinity are constructed and internalized, such assumptions become lived realities and an absolute truth. Watson (1998) notes, that, disabled people internalise and accept assumptions about them as their reality. Furthermore, this self-stigma seems to be characterised by a lack of trust in one's abilities which Gerschik and Miller (1994 in Shuttleworth et al, 2012) note may hinder one from subscribing to hegemonic masculinity.

4.2 Barriers in creating a masculine identity

4.2.1 Negotiating intimate relationships

Given that assumptions about disabled people can cause self-stigma, these blind male students also reported the degree to which these assumptions are created and the impact it has on the process of negotiating their masculinity in intimate relationships. They referred to social stereotypes that people hold about people living with blindness to be a barrier such as if one is blind one is not capable of being in an intimate relationship. This was addressed as a barrier to performing an accepted masculine identity as well as conforming to what other boys do such as getting into intimate relationships. The participants said that the challenge in negotiating relationships is rooted in the assumption that they require special treatment since they are regarded as not capable of doing things independently. In addressing this SPHL said:

“[...] to find someone to be in an intimate relationship with (.) that is a challenge because people do not understand. I even saw that when I arrived here at the university, others still hold that people who are blind cannot do things themselves, a person would be asking you ‘who feeds you?’, ‘who takes you to the toilet?’ They think about all those things and that maybe if they get into a relationship with someone who is blind than they will have to do all these things for you”. – SPHL

This participant also points out the assumption that blind people cannot do things by themselves, that they need someone to assist them all the time. SPHL suggests that people think that blind people are always dependent on someone; therefore if one becomes involved in a relationship with a blind person, one will have to help them. It can be argued that with these assumptions blind people may possibly be avoided by potential female partners because of the fear that they will have to do things for them most of the time. Petros et al (2006) observe that such challenges are the main cause of *othering*. Therefore because of othering resulting from these stereotypes they often find it challenging to be in intimate relationships.

Despite being avoided by potential female partners, participants also pointed out that the difficulties of being in intimate relationships makes them avoid the process of negotiating their masculinity in intimate relationships. The findings of this study illustrate why PLWD tend to

avoid intimate relationships. The participants explained that they avoid intimate relationships in order to escape the challenges confronted when negotiating such relationships. JHN provides an example of the challenges he has experienced in negotiating his masculinity in intimate relationships which has made him avoid this process.

“[...] when you are blind it is not very easy to find a girlfriend and girls would not want you as a blind person. You see it is not quite easy... So sometimes it is difficult to negotiate (.) eish! It's difficult to be rejected, like myself I hate being rejected. So, it is now two years and I have been proposing to a lady, I struggle a lot. She just asks me lot of questions, how do I know if she is beautiful? [...] even if I want to take her out to eat sometime - it's difficult”. – JHN

JHN notes the anticipation of being rejected which sets up barriers in negotiating an intimate relationship. This results from the construction of a disabled identity as well as always having to rationalise one's abilities. Because it is expected that people with disabilities have a failed masculinity, these male students avoid approaching girls so that they do not have to explain their abilities, even though they still feel compelled to challenge stereotypes about PLWD. This subordinates their masculine identity as their sense of failure becomes a form of a failed masculinity as defined by Cecil et al (2010). Therefore, they not only fear being rejected by women, but are also afraid of accepting a subordinate masculinity.

Although other male students also find it difficult to negotiate intimate relationships, attitudes to PLWD mean that those who are already in relationships still find themselves compelled to explain how they would do things that sighted men would do when they are in a relationship. Another challenge that these male students identified was their inability to see what women look like. Bullard and Knight (1981) note, that, negotiating intimate relationships is very difficult for PLWD. The participants said that not being able to see what women look like, appreciate their beauty or discuss their attractiveness with their male friends is an important challenge as this is a standard way in which other male students negotiate their masculine identity. Appreciating a woman's beauty is an important aspect of the performance of hegemonic masculinity. The following excerpts highlight these challenges:

“Sometimes I even tell myself that this is a difficult moment of being a blind person in a relationship with a sighted person in terms of showing her love because sometimes other people do that by connecting with their eyes, maybe the way someone blushes could turn another partner on (.) through facial expressions”. –YN

“The only thing I won’t see is her beauty, and I won’t be able to see her naked and fantasize about it. So, yeah! And that is the reason why I don’t hit on girls. I hardly hit on girls maybe it would take time because I first have to think of that I will have to convince her that although I cannot see but I can love her” – SL

SL indicates that not being able to see a woman affects his sexuality as he constantly worries about how he can convince a girl that he can love her although he is blind. He adds that he is not able to fantasize about a girlfriend’s body in the same way that sighted male students would. He points out that blind male students negotiate their lives by explaining their impairment in order to be accepted as normal. In a relationship with a woman, they find themselves having to debunk assumptions about blind people by explaining their abilities. The above quotation also indicates that sight is a form of communication which allows relationships to develop. This is obviously an importance deficit for people living with blindness.

In addition to the above, these participants also experienced intense fear of being cheated on. They cannot see what is happening around them or what their partners might be doing behind their backs. Unless someone else tells them about the cheating, they will not be able to prove it. This intensifies their insecurity about entering into intimate relationships. JHN expressed this challenge:

“[...] in relationships the only thing that you must expect is to be cheated [...] If I have a girlfriend I do not care if the girlfriend is cheating or not but I know I have just experienced that thing in life... not having sight is painful you see... the only thing is just to love yourself. You must expect each and every time you can be cheated” – JHN

JHN copes by expecting to be cheated on as he puts it out that it is easy for a girlfriend to manipulate someone who is blind. This further highlights that although blind male students do

get committed to relationships there are challenges that can make them start avoiding being in relationships; not because of accepting a failed masculine identity but due to fear of being manipulated. Similar to JHN's experience of being cheated SL also recounted his experience of being manipulated by his girlfriend who cheated with his friend.

“In my relationships that I have had, I have always been the man or should I say “the man” but there was that girl maybe I do not know what was the fact for her to flirt or cheat with someone that I was close to, in fact he was my friend”. – SL

Such experiences expressed by these participants may be the result for some of these blind male students to distrust not only women but also to avoid intimate relationships.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that when blind male students are in relationships, they find it difficult to explain to others how it is possible for them to do so. Sighted male students tend to assume that being blind prevents a man from being in an intimate relationship. They also feel pressured to explain their disability and abilities when they attempt to establish a new relationship with females.

“They appreciate that she is beautiful and you would see that there are questions in terms of who chose her for me. As I have said that people would want to choose for us (.) So the first question they would ask; (.) is she your girlfriend? (.) ‘Yes she is mine’ - Eish! Who chose such a beautiful girl for you?” – SB

SB highlights that other male students are surprised that he is able to attract a beautiful girl. Again, this indicates that sighted male students assume that blind men cannot engage in heterosexual relationships, especially not with beautiful women, and find it a ‘miracle’ that they are able to do so.

The standards of hegemonic masculinity at the university include that a man needs to have a girlfriend or multiple girlfriends. These standards set criteria for how one should behave and the type of a girlfriend one should date. The findings suggest that, given the barriers identified, it is a challenge for blind male students to live up these standards. This impacts negatively on how

PLWD negotiate intimate relationships. Even when they are intimately involved with someone, their masculinity and abilities are still in question.

4.2.2 Construction of blind men's sexuality and relationships

Blind male students were asked about their sexuality as men living with disabilities. The questions included questions like; “what influence does having visual impairment exert on your sexuality?” These questions were aimed not only to establish whether the stereotypes and attitudes people hold about blind men's sexuality are true, but to understand their experience of sexuality which is often questioned, subordinated and unknown. The findings concurred with the evidence in the literature that disabled people are regarded as asexual (Addlakha, 2007; Cheausuwantavee, 2002; Meekosha, 2004; Shakespeare, 1999). The students indicated that someone who does not have a girlfriend is referred to as ‘*izishimane*’³ (bachelor). Blind male students are bound to be called or assumed to be ‘*izishimane*’. This suggests that their masculinity is overlooked or subordinated as a result of their impairment. However, these participants reject these assumptions by positioning themselves as not being bachelors and asserting that their masculinity is different from other male students' construction of a masculine identity. Asked about the assumptions associated with blind male students' sexuality in the university context, one participant said:

“The stigma that we have experienced so far and that (.) oh! I almost forgotten the big one; that we are bachelors. It is not that we are “izishimane” [bachelors] but it is that some of us (.) it is that some of us as we come from other school and when someone arrives here they are scared to hit on girls because they are used to girls that they used to stay with who were loose”. – YN

This indicates a defence mechanism used by these male students in terms of their masculinity. YN notes that other men explain blind men's lack of a relationship by saying that they are ‘*izishimane*’. However, he hastens to add that the real reason is simply that they are unused to university women, as they previously associated with women “who were loose”. This is an

³ *Izishimane* is an isiZulu word that describes a group of men who do not have a girlfriend. This word is often used to describe a subordinated masculinity in the eyes of hegemonic standards of masculinity.

attempt to defend their masculinity. These findings are similar to what Gerschick and Miller (1994) define as a *reformulation* response to hegemonic masculinity because they have reformulated their position to justify what is perceived as a limitation for them. It is also similar to Wetherell and Edley's (1999) idea of rebellious positioning due to their dismissal of the social expectations of a masculine identity by positioning themselves as unconventional.

4.2.3 Pressure on sexual performance

The literature notes, that, one of the social expectations of men is the ability to perform sexually. Sexual performance is often regarded one of the most important markers of masculine identity (Hollway, 1989 in Langa, 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising that sexual performance was one of the issues raised by blind male students in discussing aspects of their masculinity. The participants reported that one of the things that sighted male students would usually talk about besides girls is sex; they would talk about how good they are. If sexual performance and desirability are considered important markers of masculinity, showing sexual skills reveals a desirable masculinity while the inability to perform sexually suggests a failed or problematic masculinity. Therefore, the participants noted that in order to disprove the stereotype or myth of being regarded as asexual, it is important to prove that they can perform better sexually and thus maintain their masculine identity. The excerpt below reveals that it is believed that a man's sexual potency, as a marker of their masculinity, is revealed by the sounds women make during intercourse.

"[...] here at res for someone to be seen as powerful it is when they are with a girl ahhh (.) like he has a visit from a girl and that when they are having their intimate moment or when they are having sex a girl is supposed to make loud orgasms so everyone can hear her in the corridor". - YN

YN notes that if a girl makes loud noises during sexual intercourse, this indicates masculinity. In light of assumptions about disabled men's sexuality, these blind male students use this as a way to assert that, although they are blind, they are competently sexual – rejecting the assumed notion of the asexuality of blind students by sighted male students. This resonates with Guldin's (2000) observation that despite the stereotypes about disabled people as asexual, they

consider themselves more sexually experienced and better lovers than those who do not have a disability.

“So it once happened that I also had, well most of the time, let me not say ‘it once happened’ (.) most of the time girls during sex they make loud noise until everyone hears it in the corridor[...] When I was sitting with other guys they starts saying that I am ‘inkuzi’ [bull/referring someone dominant] and they sometime even call you ‘umabhebhane’ (someone who is good in sexual intercourse)”. – YN

This participant highlights the importance of performing sexually in a way that is apparent to others. He indicates that it is important to be praised by sighted male students; for him, this suggests a dominant type of masculinity. Given that these participants are post pubertal and at a transitional stage to adulthood, feedback from peers is important in the construction of their masculinity.

Moreover, the notion of dominance is identifiable through the use of descriptive words such as ‘inkuzi’ (a bull). This suggests that pressure to perform sexually is somewhat similar to sighted male students but because of a presumed asexuality, there is more pressure on blind males students to prove that they are sexual. According to Cecil et al (2010) man’s inability to perform sexually suggests a disabled identity which results in a subordination and the marginalisation of their masculinity Cecil et al (2010). Therefore, these blind male student’s sexual lives are commonly assumed to be non-existent, which therefore overshadows their abilities. To reject the subordination of their masculinity, these male students do their best to demonstrate their sexual potency to other male students. These findings are similar to those of Cecil et al (2010) who reported that when men are not able to perform sexually, their masculinity becomes humiliated. This therefore becomes one of the markers of a subordinated masculinity. These findings are also in accordance with Hollway’s (1989 in Langa, 2012) idea that masculinity is defined by a capability to perform sexually.

Because blind men are regarded as asexual or as being unable to live up to what is expected of them sexually, the findings reveal that some of those who cannot live up to the hegemonic standards of masculinity used different sex enhancing drugs to support their sexual performance and satisfy their partners so that they can be regarded as ‘inkunzi’ which is an aspect of a

dominant masculinity among university male population and which also indicate the important of peer feedback in their construction of masculinity. YN talked about the sex enhancing drugs used by both blind and sighted male students in order to live up to the expected standards of masculinity.

“There are many things in our days and if someone sees that they are not fit enough or do not meet the criteria of having a bigger and long penis and to make girls cry and make them reach orgasm, other people end up using things like Spanish fly⁴ (.). You hear one saying that they will buy a pump and hear others saying that they would take Viagra.” – YN

However, YN highlighted that for blind male students already living with a disability, it becomes a double burden when they do not meet these standards. Their masculinity becomes marginalised because of the inability to perform as expected and this may result to a failed masculinity. Cecil et al (2010) observes that a man with disabilities’ inability to perform sexually results in a humiliation of their masculinity. Beigi and Cheng (2010) found that those who lack sexual skills become marginalized and their masculinity is questioned. Therefore to avoid the humiliation or subjugation of their masculinity and to be praised by other male students they use sex enhancing drugs to optimize their sexual performance and pass the test of hegemonic masculinity. These findings are in accordance with Gershick and Miller (1994 in Shuttleworth et al, 2012) who contend that to avoid the failure to negotiate masculinity some men were found to comply with the hegemonic standards of masculinity. The use of drugs to enhance sexual performance suggests a desperate desire to attain this hegemonic marker of masculinity and the rejection of a subordinate masculinity. Therefore using drugs becomes a successful practice to negotiate the sexual aspect of their masculinity by making their female partners cry, an indication that they have reach orgasm, as expected by other male students. Having a large penis also seems to play a huge role in the performance of masculinity. Since blind male student’s sexual identity is already marginalised, using these drugs is an important aspect of how they negotiate their masculinity while breaking the stereotypes about PLWD as asexual.

⁴ Spanish fly is a potent aphrodisiac used to enhance sexual drive and performance for both men and women (Spanish Fly Aphrodisiac, n.d.).

Moreover, in order to prove that they are not asexual and to negotiate their masculinity, the participants felt that they were under pressure to have girlfriends. PML recounted his experience:

“I keep asserting the point that I do not have a girlfriend, they would say ‘you must get a girlfriend (.) you must get a girlfriend’ but I do not have time to maintain a girlfriend right now so that is why I do not have a girlfriend”. – PML

Niehaus (2005 in Langa, 2008) argue that peer pressure is commonly used by men to police adherence to standards of masculinity. Similar to these scholar’s argument blind male students in this study were under pressure from sighted male students to have multiple girlfriends in order to reject the subordination of their masculinity through the belief that they are asexual.

Furthermore, the participants also felt pressured to produce children as proof of their masculinity. JHN talked about his children and pointed to the pressure on other blind male students to become fathers:

“I was not blind so yeah, I have two daughters so I think these guys also wanted to have children. So there is pressure (.) pressure, pressure, there is pressure amongst them. They would say the time is going for me so I must have a child”. – JHN

It can be argued that according to the response that JHN receives from other male students having a child proves to society that blind men are not asexual. This is because pressure to have children is mainly influenced by cultural expectations that having a child or children is a defining characteristic of being a man. Cole and Glass (1977) also found that PLWD were very concerned about reproduction, sexual pleasure and self-image. Therefore it reasonable that blind men like other sighted male students behave in different ways in order to avoid being othered by sighted men as well as to conform to societal standards, and one of the ways of doing that is to have children.

4.3 Strategies employed in negotiating the barriers to establish a masculine identity

4.3.1 A collective Identity

Most mainstream schools do not have the infrastructure to accommodate PLWD and many go to special needs schools that only accommodate PLWD. While these schools are designed to cope with their disabilities, being in these schools exacerbates their difference or otherness. Although it was not one of the areas that this research focused on, a majority of participants spoke about their lives in special schools with regards to their construction of masculinity. They also indicated how their previous experiences have informed their values and views about the construction of masculinity within the university. They further indicated that their shared experiences in special schools have influenced the positions they hold about masculinity. The findings suggest PLWD in special schools construct their own private and perhaps different worlds. Their lives become highly influenced by their disability, setting them apart from common societal norms. The findings reveal that these male students have been placed in boarding schools for primary and high school education and have only been exposed to ‘mainstream’ education when they enroll to university. This presents the challenge of negotiating their lives in a new and unfamiliar environment. The findings further indicate that when they come to university, these male students need to find their way around in a competitive and unsupportive environment. Living up to the common standards of masculinity expected of all men is an important part of this process of adaptation. The following excerpt is from a participant whose entire school life was spent at a boarding school for people who are blind. He explains that this was very different from what he has been exposed to since he enrolled at university.

“Most of the time for people from the special schools is that what happens is that when we are there we are in ‘our own world’ and we learn to know each other and value each other. We try to diversify the world that we are in, like have ended up having different clicks. It is when we go to the outer world that we start recognising that things have changed, and instead of being more open to other people we tend to create ‘our own groups’”. – YN

Given the assumptions and attitudes attached to living with a disability, creating their “own groups” in the university context allows blind male students to escape the assumptions that have made the process of negotiating their masculinity challenging, as they still identify

themselves as a group. The process described in the previous paragraph is what Ridolfo (2010) describes as a *collective identity*. Identifying with other PLWD enables these students to understand their experiences which can facilitate personal empowerment and change. These findings also concur with Jenkins' argument (1996 in Richardson, 2010) that the construction of masculinity among young men results from identification with people with whom they share similar experiences as well as those with whom they share differences. Hence these blind male students have collectively constructed their masculinity with those who share similar experiences. Although this seems to be an adaptive coping strategy, providing support from others with similar challenges and experiences, it risks setting them apart as different or othered.

4.3.2 Selecting a partner: Challenges and strategies

Benjamin (2001) found that blind men struggle to conform to the standards of hegemonic masculinity in order to avoid being marginalised. This was echoed in the present study which found that in order to conform to these standards blind male students adopted various strategies to establish a viable masculine identity. The findings already reported have illustrated the importance of engagement in intimate relationships as an aspect of a masculine identity. Due to their inability to see potential partners, blind students reported using other senses to negotiate their masculine identity in intimate relationships. These include touching and hearing so they can navigate the environment and create internal images or representations of their partner. They use these senses to determine whether the girl they want to approach meets the standards of their ideal partner and what other male students see as an ideal partner. Like other male students, choosing a partner is very competitive – one has certain criteria. They enlist the help of sighted peers to establish the acceptability of a female partner. YN describes the strategies he uses to choose an ideal partner.

“I would take someone with me and try to meet with that girl and spend time with her then ask him once the girl has left ‘how is that girl?’ I have created a scale. If a girl is taller then that is a point lost and when she is big; another point lost (.) So when we are walking and I hear a girl’s voice then I would ask ‘how is this girl’ sometimes others I don’t even ask (.) I would tap him on the

shoulder and if she is the girl then he would tap on my shoulder as if he is playing a keyboard 1234 than I will see that she is 4 out of 10". – YN

While YN taps his friend to help him choose a girl, other blind male students use other techniques like voices to establish whether or not a girl meets the standards they require of an ideal partner. These practices may be seen as enactments of forms of hegemonic masculinity which require that masculinity is partially defined by men having female partners (Gershick & Miller, 1994 in Shuttleworth et al, 2012). However, they also expose these men's vulnerability, as decisions regarding the acceptability and desirability of women are highly influenced by their friends' judgement which may differ from theirs. Although judging a girl by her voice does not require assistance from a sighted peer, SL added that it is potentially deceiving.

"Another thing is that the voice is deceiving, you will tell yourself that it is the person that you want and only to find out that she is not. Sometimes you will want your friends to tell you and only to find that their preference of girls is not the same as yours or your friend can say that this girl is beautiful in order to praise you". – SL

This practice is particularly problematic because these students' private lives become a public matter as they depend on the assistance and approval of their peers who are not blind. Their sense of masculinity is compromised by their lack of independence even in such situations where a man needs to demonstrate their masculinity through dominance over women and choosing a partner.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the experiences of blind male students in negotiating their masculinity in a university environment. It explored how blind male student's masculinity is constructed and the barriers and enablers in their process of performing an acceptable masculinity and sexuality. The findings were presented in relation to the objectives of the study and the reviewed literature.

The findings suggest that masculinity is highly hegemonic in a university environment and that blind male students have to negotiate their masculinity in line with hegemonic standards. It is evident from the findings that blind male students position themselves inconsistently in relation to hegemonic standards of masculinity. In contrast with Connell's (1995) notion that men either live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity or become subordinated, it was found that blind male students sometimes conform to hegemonic standards by negotiating their behaviour in accordance with those of hegemonic masculinity, whereas in some situations they oppose or distance themselves from these standards. Due to such paradoxical positions, it can be argued that the way in which these male students position themselves mirrors Wetherell and Edley's (1999) finding that men take up different positions in relation to hegemonic standards of masculinity.

The "3 R framework" by Gerschik and Miller (1994) is useful for understanding these findings. This highlights the different strategies that blind male students use in order to negotiate their masculinity. In the process, they sometimes avoid their masculinity being subordinated. This is illustrated by their claims to powerful sexuality as well as their involvement in social activities that sighted male students engage in. Blind male students sometimes struggle with these standards and would therefore rather reformulate them. For example, should they feel that they cannot match sighted male students' success in attracting girlfriends they would reformulate these actions by finding them unconventional. It is evident from the findings that these male students use culture as a way to reformulate the standards of hegemonic masculinity. However, they sometimes reject these hegemonic norms. This was illustrated by their claims that sighted male students demonstrate immature behavior in terms of their perceptions of the number of

girls a man should have. However, it is not clear whether or not this is an attempt to justify their failure to conform to hegemonic norms of masculinity.

One of the major concerns arising from the study is the stigma and assumptions that sighted people hold about PLWD such as blindness. These become barriers for blind male students in negotiating their masculinity. They exacerbate othering as well as the subordination of their masculinity. Therefore it can be argued that living with blindness as a man is an even greater burden as these stigmatizing assumptions become a barrier to their masculinity. These findings support the main argument that is raised by the social model of disability, namely; that living with a disability means that you are disabled and that as a man you cannot perform tasks that other men perform. Thus the social model of disability contends that PLWD are not impaired rather living with a disability or disabilities. It states that attitudes and assumptions constructed about PLWD result in a disabled identity. In other words, blind male students are disabled because of how their disability is constructed and othered by sighted people, rather than by their impaired vision. Therefore it is the stigma which makes the process of negotiating masculinity such a difficult one. Moreover, the findings show that blind male students internalize these attitudes as a limitation in their ability to perform tasks that sighted male students perform which further complicates their identity as young men and also result in self-stigma.

Despite the stigma and the barriers experienced a collective identity is formed. A collective identity is useful in confronting such prejudicial assumptions arising from the construction of their disability and masculinity. These male students indicated that because they had attended special schools, they easily identified themselves with other disabled students, resulting in a collective identity. It can be argued that their exclusion from mainstream schools has a significant impact on living with a disability as well as the process of negotiating their masculinity when they enter the world of university. While forging a collective identity enables these male students to confront the stigma attached to their disabilities, they find it difficult to adjust to the university environment and to negotiate their masculinity in relation to the hegemonic masculine identity which is shared amongst other male students.

Implications of the findings

Another concern highlighted by the findings is that the participants felt that the university is not doing much to accommodate PLWD, which results in some form of othering. They find themselves disabled by the university infrastructure that is not accommodating for people living with disabilities as well as the attitudes that other students hold; this perpetuates their disabled identity. The university environment is also presented by the participants as even perpetuating the barriers to establishing a viable masculine identity as disabled people. It can therefore be argued that the disability units or departments that provide support for students living with disabilities in universities should consider interventions for students living with disabilities which will open a platform for them to address such issues. By doing so, universities would be able to start interventions directed to raising awareness of disability within the university community. This will also be of assistance in fighting against the marginalization of students living with disabilities. These interventions can also be included in residence life programmes given that most students living with disabilities reside within the university residences.

Recommendations for further research

This study addressed a number of challenges that blind male students confront in the university environment not only due to the construction of their masculinity, but also with regards to establishing a viable masculine identity as a young men living with a disability. The findings of this study raised a number of issues confronted by these students that require further investigation. Some of these issues would include the construction of a disabled identity among university students compared to the general public; this has been presented in a manner that the construction of their identity and masculinity within the university differs from how it is constructed in their communities which has been one of the reasons for the challenges confronting blind male students in negotiating their masculinity. This is an important issue as it results in the abilities of students living with disabilities being overlooked.

The following recommendations may enhance the findings on future research conducted among people living with disabilities. Since this study was only limited to participants being

students, future studies should employ bigger and more varied samples. New research may also compare men living with different disabilities in terms of their experiences in negotiating a masculine identity, as the present study only focuses on blindness. New research studies could also compare experiences of blind men at different developmental stages, to see if the findings of this study change over different developmental stages. Finally, the use of varied methods of data collection including focus groups may give different perspectives from that presented in the this study.

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Appendix A



Good Morning / Afternoon/ Evening,

My name is Thokozani Sithole a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, school of Psychology in Pietermaritzburg Campus, South Africa. I am conducting research on the experiences of blind male students in regards to the construction of their sexuality. This is part of an ongoing research project on masculinity by Prof Lindegger, my supervisor.

Participation in this study will take about 40 minutes to an hour. You will be invited to participate in a group discussion as well as an individual interview. I will be asking you about questions related to the experiences of your sexuality as a man living with visual impairment. I will need permission to use a tape recorder to capture conversation and also to take notes during this process.

All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly **CONFIDENTIAL**. All participants in will be asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion. The information collected will be stored in my supervisor's office and only research assistants working with me on this project will have access to it. Information will be used for research purposes alone and raw data will be kept safe for five years in the psychology department archives for future publications. Also, we will not use your actual name or designation in reporting the findings of the study but will use disguised name/pseudonym to make sure that no one links the information you have given us to you.

Your participation in this study is **VOLUNTARY** and you have the right not to participate if you do not want to, or to withdraw at any stage. If you agree to take part in the study, I will ask you to sign an informed consent form. Please note that you will not be at any disadvantage if you choose not to participate in the study. You may also refuse to answer particular questions if you don't feel comfortable answering them. You may also end the

discussion at any time if you feel uncomfortable with the interview. Counselling services will be in place in case you experience any form of distress during the duration of this study.

This study is conducted under the supervision of Professor G. Lindegger. The researcher is Thokozani Sithole.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this important study.

Thokozani I. Sithole

MSoc Sc. Counselling Psychology Student

thokozi@gmail.com

Consent Form

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

1. 2019 年 12 月 31 日，本公司 2019 年度股东大会审议通过《关于 2019 年度利润分配预案的议案》，以 2019 年 12 月 31 日总股本 100,000,000 股为基数，向全体股东每 10 股派发现金股利 1.00 元（含税），共计派发现金股利 10,000,000.00 元。

Appendix B

Guiding Interview Questions

May you please tell me how do you define being a man?

What do men do that makes them men?

What does it mean to you to be man?

Are there any influences in your identity as a man?

What are types of men that are found here at the university?

What does it mean to be a man living with blindness?

What are the challenges you confront as a man living with blindness within the university?

How do you negotiate your manhood when confronted with these challenges?

Do you think being blind affect your masculinity?

How do other male students perceive your masculinity as a blind man?

How do other male students perceive your sexuality as a blind man?

How do you negotiate against the perceptions about blind men's sexuality?

Are there any challenges you experience in relationships (intimate), and how do you confront them?

May you please tell me if you were born blind or acquired?

Acquired Blindness (only):

What are the challenges you have experienced with regards to your disability?

Are there any differences you have experienced with regards to your masculinity/sexuality?



UNIVERSITY OF
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INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

29th June 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

The Disability Unit on the Howard College campus is fully aware of the research being undertaken by Thokozani Sithole as part of his Master Research Project. We believe that his research will provide information that would be used to develop support programmes for visually impaired male student. Mr Sithole will conduct interviews and a focus group with male students with visual impairments on the Howard College Campus during 2012.

Please feel free to contact our office for further information.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nevil Balakrishna'.

Nevil Balakrishna

Disability Coordinator

Howard College

031-2603070

balakrishna@ukzn.ac.za